

**Dealing with Conflicting Visions of the Past**  
**The Case of European Memory**

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# Abstract

The aim of my dissertation is to understand and critically evaluate how the idea of European memory has been conceptualised by different actors at the European level and to develop a novel, pluralist conception.

Attempting to ground European integration and the attachment to Europe in historical narratives has become increasingly important for the EU since the loss of its main ideological “Other,” the Soviet Union. The projects adopted in this vein often have the explicit goal to address the “legitimacy problem” and the “democratic deficit” by promoting European identity. In the EU politics-academia nexus, where most of the related debate takes place, the buzzword “European memory” has become very fashionable in the last decade. The idea has been conceptualised in a variety of ways, but most of these are characterised by teleological frameworks and problem-solving thinking.

In my dissertation, I examine and critically evaluate how the idea of European memory has been conceptualised by different actors at the European level, and I develop a novel conception based on radical democratic theory. I analyse how the concept of European memory has been used in different European institutions and cultural projects (such as the European Parliament and the House of European History), and I critically reflect on these practices. In my pluralist vision of the European mythical space, conflicting visions of the past are not regarded as an anomaly that needs to be overcome by rational consensus or as an asset that can be harvested in order to bolster the legitimacy of certain political bodies. This vision takes difference to be an inevitable condition of social life and it argues that, instead of trying to resolve conflicting interpretations of the past, social difference should be embraced and the nature of conflict should be changed so that antagonistic relationships can become agonistic ones through dialogue and education.

On the one hand, my dissertation contributes to the field of memory studies with a comprehensive pluralist approach to myth. On the other hand, I contribute to European studies, and more specifically to the academic discussion about European memory, when I contextualise this theory of myth in the contemporary European politics of the past.



To Lilla



This is the attempt to free mankind from Nietzsche's "longest lie," the notion that outside the haphazard and perilous experiments we perform there lies something (God, Science, Knowledge, Rationality, or Truth) which will, if only we perform the correct rituals, step in to save us.

Richard Rorty

*Consequences of Pragmatism* (1982)

That was probably the reason that history was more of an oracle than a science. Perhaps later, much later, it would be taught by means of tables of statistics, supplemented by such anatomical sections... Until this stage was reached, politics would remain bloody dilettantism, mere superstition and black magic.

Arthur Koestler

*Darkness at Noon* (1940)

... anything less than an encounter with traumatic ungroundedness is not an ethics or a politics but a technology.

Jenny Edkins

*Remembering Relationality* (2006)





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# Abbreviations

ALDE	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
ECP	Europe for Citizens Programme
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists
ENRS	European Network Remembrance and Solidarity
EP	European Parliament
EPP	European People's Party
Greens/EFA	The Greens/European Free Alliance
GUE/NGL	European United Left/Nordic Green Left
IND/DEM	Independence/Democracy
HEH	House of European History
LDT	liberal democratic theory
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MP	Member of Parliament
NI	Non-Inscrit
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
PD	Prague Declaration
PEMC or Platform	Platform of European Memory and Conscience
PM	Prime Minister
RDT	radical democratic theory
RECT	Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism
REHG or Group	Reconciliation of European Histories Group
RWW2	Resolution on the Sixtieth Anniversary of the End of the Second World War
SD	Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats
UEN	Union for Europe of the Nations

## Note about the use of abbreviations in tables

In tables, the abbreviations of the names of the political groups in the European Parliament indicated above denote the current political groups as well as all their predecessors. Nationalities are represented by international licence plate country codes.

# Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University of similar institution.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit of 80,000 words.

Mano Gabor Toth

12 June 2017

# Acknowledgements

This dissertation, as most dissertations I suppose, is a form of self-therapy. From the beginning, it was motivated by the ambition to make sense of phenomena that I had experienced in my daily life in Hungary and had found so fascinating, intriguing and frustrating at the same time. The central puzzle is how conflicting visions of the past and their proponents can be made to relate to each other in a non-antagonistic way. It is certainly not “solved,” but after the intellectual journey of my PhD, it has definitely become easier to live with.

The long intellectual and actual journey of this dissertation started and ended in Cambridge. Most of the time, working on such a liminal project felt like trying to find land in uncharted seas. First and foremost, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my brilliant supervisors, Harald Wydra and Duncan Bell, for sailing with me to these dark waters, for guiding me out of whirlpools and for helping me steer through narrow straits. I thank them for their generosity and honesty, for being patient with me and for providing just the right kind of push when it was needed.

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# 1

## Introduction

When I tell people that I write my doctoral dissertation on the idea of European memory, almost every time they ask two questions in rapid succession: “So tell me, does a European memory exist? What does it look like?” I found that these simple questions, casually thrown away by well-meaning people who just wanted to show a fleeting interest in my topic out of common courtesy, were extremely difficult to answer, especially within the ten-second attention span that is typical of a dinner party. Strangely enough, these are also the very questions that most of the scholarly works on European memory aim to answer. I soon realised that I found these questions so difficult to answer because they are based on the commonsensical assumption that regards memory as a thing that there is or there is not, as a thing that exists or does not exist. Motivated by the conviction that a collective memory is not a thing that a community has or does not have, but a practice that communities do or do not do,<sup>1</sup> I propose a different set of questions: “Who does and should do European memory? How is it and should it be done?” These are the questions that I seek to address in my project.

### **The Problem of European Memory and Its Relevance**

“In taking upon herself for more than 20 years the role of champion of a united Europe, France has always had as her essential aim the service of peace. A united Europe was not achieved and we had war.” The opening sentences of one of the founding texts of European integration, the Schuman Declaration of 1950, allude to the devastating experience of the Second World War and warn that only a united Europe can guarantee peace. As political references to past events in general, the Declaration appeals to history in order to set a vision for the future rather than to simply make a statement about what happened in the past. After reminding its audience of the war and the consequences of political fragmentation on the continent, the Schuman Declaration goes

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<sup>1</sup> As Jeffrey Olick put it, collective memory is “something—or, rather many things—we do, not something—or many things—we have.” Jeffrey K. Olick, “From Collective Memory to the Sociology of Mnemonic Practices and Products,” in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 159.

on to propose the pooling of coal and steel production in France and Germany, and the establishment of a common High Authority to oversee the production, with the explicit ambition to safeguard peace.

In the decades that followed, the development of the European integration project was accompanied by numerous visions for the future of Europe and calls for concerted European political action that were substantiated with references to historical events and processes. Many different conceptions of Europe have been argued for and as many different historical narratives. Soft power Europe, normative power Europe, Christian Europe, Enlightened Europe, Classical Europe, fortress Europe, open Europe—all of these visions have been supported with different, and often conflicting, interpretations of the past. Attempting to ground European integration and the attachment to Europe in historical narratives has become increasingly important for the European Union (EU) since the loss of its main “Other,” the Soviet Union. The projects adopted in this vein often have the explicit goal to address the “legitimacy problem” and the “democratic deficit” by promoting European identity. In the EU politics-academia nexus, where most of the related debate takes place, the buzzword “European memory” has become very fashionable in the last decade. The lively debate about this concept is usually centred around two questions: Does the EU as an organisation need to develop a more united approach with respect to historical narratives? If yes, what should this common approach look like? What is at stake in answering these questions is nothing less than the future direction of the EU. As visions for the future of the organisation are intimately connected to historical accounts of the continent’s past, determining the common European approach to the past is a highly influential decision for the EU’s future.

All this is meant to show that the discussion about European memory is far from being a “merely” symbolic issue with no political consequences. Imagining Europe and its past in different ways will lead to different real political outcomes. For instance, thinking about Europe as an embodiment of the values of the Enlightenment (such as human rights, liberal democracy and reason) is bound to produce different political decisions with respect to enlargement than considering Europe as an entity built on the heritage of Christianity. Seeing European institutions as a guarantor of peace on the continent, as a guarantor of prosperity or as a guarantor that massive human rights violations like genocide will “never again” be committed on its soil all entail different political objectives. Similarly, thinking about European memory as a thing or a social construct, as one memory or as a plurality of memories, as the end point of deliberation or as a dialogical process

are not merely inconsequential cultural “froth on the tides of society,”<sup>2</sup> but are crucially important issues with real political consequences.

### **A New Approach to the Idea of European Memory**

Many previous scholarly works aiming to determine what the common European approach to historical narratives looks like or should look like start by asking if a common European memory already exists; if they answer in the affirmative, they seek to determine what it is; if they answer in the negative, they seek to determine what it can be in the future. These accounts of European memory imply either a search for a thing “out there” in the real world that needs to be pinned down, or a search for something that politicians and/or academics need to define and construct. On the one hand, the former approach is inappropriate because it is based on the presupposition that a collective memory exists or does not exist and that academic enquiry can study its existence from a distance. This approach considers possible, and even desirable, to observe the politics of the past in a detached way and not to engage with difficult normative issues. On the other hand, I find the latter approach inappropriate as it is entirely based on what Robert Cox called problem-solving thinking. This scholarly attitude considers the importance of solving the problem at hand almost self-evident; it “takes the world as it finds it, with the prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions into which they are organised, as the given framework for action”; its strength “lies in its ability to fix limits or parameters to a problem area.”<sup>3</sup> The works on European memory of this second type are problem-solvers in that they take it for granted that the EU faces a legitimacy problem and that it is important to address this issue, and they consider it their task to solve this problem. They do engage with normative questions, but their ultimate aim is to support the legitimacy of European institutions. As Gregor Feindt et al. noted, this “unreflected instrumentalization of European Memory”<sup>4</sup> for political purposes indeed permeates both scholarly and public debates about the concept.

In contrast to the first approach, I propose a consciously engaged scholarly attitude that instead of regarding memories as things existing out there, it considers them to be social constructs; it rejects that researchers can be the detached observers of the social world, and believes that researchers should be open about their normative convictions and should reflect upon the broader social implications of their work. In contrast to the second approach, I propose a critical attitude

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<sup>2</sup> William H. Sewell, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 159.

<sup>3</sup> Robert W. Cox, “Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory,” *Millennium – Journal of International Studies* 10, no. 2 (1981): 128–129.

<sup>4</sup> Gregor Feindt et al., eds., *Europäische Erinnerung Als Verflochtene Erinnerung* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2014). Abstract at [http://www.v-r.de/en/europaeische\\_erinnerung\\_als\\_verflochtene\\_erinnerung/t-211/1010398/](http://www.v-r.de/en/europaeische_erinnerung_als_verflochtene_erinnerung/t-211/1010398/).

which challenges the taken-for-granted assumptions upon which the questions asked by the problem-solving approach are based and believes that “the role of the intellectual is not to consolidate authority, but to understand, interpret and question it.”<sup>5</sup> While the critical position that I advocate is engaged, its aim is not to solve the problem of legitimacy and to support the EU, but to question European memory policies. Its objective is not to propose a consensual narrative that can be the basis of a European identity, but to understand how the state, its institutions and its citizens should deal with social difference with respect to historical narratives, and how the nature of conflict can be changed so that it enhances democracy rather than undermines it. While problem-solving focuses on the end point of deliberation and on bringing the discussion to closure, the critical attitude emphasises the importance of the dialogical process, rejects the necessity of a rational consensus and embraces unresolved (and probably unresolvable) social differences.

After posing the question about whether European memory exists, mainstream scholarly enquiry usually plunges into a historical discussion in order to determine what it is or what it can be. This way, the host of conceptual decisions and normative assumptions that these accounts make remain implicit, unacknowledged and ultimately unresolved. These commitments, however, are in no way self-evident, even if wrapping them up in historical “facts” may make them appear so. More often than not, the core concept of collective memory is left largely unexplained even though it is a highly contested and polysemous concept whose meaning is far from obvious. Indeed, getting a good analytical grip on the representations of history is difficult enough in national and subnational contexts, let alone in a vaguely defined transnational environment. European studies and memory studies have so far been preoccupied with the “European” part of the concept, with how a memory or a set of memories can be said to be European. In this process, these studies have built on the rather uncertain conceptual foundations of collective memory; they took it for granted that the debate about specific historical events would give us an answer to the problem of how a memory can be European. However, as William Sewell remarked, the addition of ever more empirical detail will not magically solve difficult conceptual and normative questions and it is a mistake to think that one can always “narrate their way out of” theoretical dilemmas.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, I argue that we need to be more attentive to the “memory” aspect of the concept of European memory and to shift the emphasis of the debate from historical discussions to ethical and conceptual ones. I agree with Feindt et al. that if we are to make sense of the idea of European

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<sup>5</sup> Edward W. Said, “On Defiance and Taking Positions,” in *American Council of Learned Societies Occasional Paper No. 31*, 1995, <http://web.archive.org/web/20160318122426/http://archives.acls.org/op/op31said.htm#said>.

<sup>6</sup> Sewell, *Logics of History*, 11.

memory, we need to go beyond purely historical accounts that, inspired by Pierre Nora's inventory of French *lieux de mémoire*, aim to build an "inventory of European landscapes of memory."<sup>7</sup> If a third, more theoretically and methodologically conscious, wave in memory studies is truly in the making, as Astrid Erll and Feindt et al. claimed,<sup>8</sup> one of its most important objectives should be to reconsider the theoretical foundations upon which prevailing conceptions of European memory are (mostly implicitly) built.

As Chapter 5 will demonstrate, there are five mainstream academic positions with the respect to the idea of European memory. Some reject it on the basis that it can only be an artificial creation, and some reject it because they deem it unnecessary for a rational, technocratic and performance-based political entity such as the EU. The dominant position has been explained above: the attempt to combine, harmonise and/or reconcile (mostly national) memories so as to form a common European view of the past (or at least some part of the past); the aim is to promote a certain loyalty to the European project on the model of national loyalties. Others argue for the harmonisation of the rules and practices of dealing with the past instead of the harmonisation of actual narratives; in this vision, national communities work through the dark parts of their history in accordance with some commonly agreed guidelines, a process that is constitutive of the post-conventional identity of the citizens. Finally, some propose to study the political initiatives relating to a common European approach to historical narratives objectively, from a distance.

The novelty of my take on the central problem of the common European approach to historical narratives is the attitude I advocate towards the existence of different and often conflicting interpretations of the past, and to minority and dissenting narratives. Whereas previous approaches assumed that social differences with respect to memories are undesirable and that they can and should be overcome by consensus, I see conflicting interpretations of the past as inevitable but not necessarily socially harmful; in fact, the plural and conflictual nature of memory can be embraced in a way that it enhances democracy. Whereas previous conceptions of European memory had the aim to legitimate political institutions by promoting new ways of self-identification for citizens, I provide a framework within which prevailing institutions and identities can be continuously challenged and reasserted, and within which the aim is to encourage dialogue so as to overcome antagonistic relationships.

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<sup>7</sup> Gregor Feindt et al., "Entangled Memory: Toward a Third Wave in Memory Studies," *History and Theory* 53, no. 1 (2014): 40; Pierre Nora, ed., *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past. I Conflicts and Divisions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Astrid Erll, "Travelling Memory," *Parallax* 17, no. 4 (2011): 4–18; Feindt et al., "Entangled Memory."

Simply put, the task for the EU in developing its common approach to historical narratives is not to “deal with the past,” as the popular translation of the German phrase *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* goes, but to deal with the necessarily multiple and conflicting representations of the past. And the way to “deal” with them is to embrace them and use them in a way that they enhance, extend and intensify democratic politics.

The intended audience of this work are primarily the academics and the political decision-makers involved in the debate about the common European approach to historical narratives and in the concrete initiatives in this vein. However, the overall message is intended to have a more general appeal. The pluralist European mythscape envisioned in the dissertation relies on the active participation of “ordinary” people in its creation and continuous renegotiation. In order to facilitate this, I hope to popularise the pluralist conception in the future in a more widely accessible manner than this scholarly work.

### **Thinking Critically About European Memory**

My study of the idea of European memory is thus composed of two, interrelated and constantly interacting, parts. The first part addresses the most important theoretical problems related to the concept of collective memory; it engages with the fundamental conceptual, social theoretical and normative issues that underpin scholarly approaches to memory. On the one hand, it provides a critical (and necessarily incomplete) overview of the collective memory literature and suggests limitations on the use of the term. On the other hand, it proposes a comprehensive pluralist approach to publicly represented identity-constitutive historical narratives (myths) that builds on earlier promising but incomplete attempts in this vein.<sup>9</sup> It remains to be seen whether the third wave in memory studies will in fact be successful, but I hope to contribute with this first part of my dissertation to such a welcome and long overdue development by specifying the conceptual, social theoretical and ethical frameworks of a novel agonistic approach to myth.

The second part turns to debates about the idea of European memory with an aim that is twofold. On the one hand, it presents the history of the concept of European memory by identifying different interpretations of this idea and by mapping their evolution over time. The genealogy of the concept engages with the research questions about who does European memory and how they do it. On the other hand, this second part uses the analytical tools developed in the first part in order to critically examine what the most prominent conceptions of European memory

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<sup>9</sup> Duncan Bell, “Agonistic Democracy and the Politics of Memory,” *Constellations* 15, no. 1 (2008): 148; Anna Cento Bull and Hans Lauge Hansen, “On Agonistic Memory,” *Memory Studies* 9, no. 4 (2016): 390–404; Maria Mälksoo, “‘Memory Must Be Defended’: Beyond the Politics of Mnemonical Security,” *Security Dialogue* 46, no. 3 (2015): 221–37.

take for granted, and also to put forward a pluralist take on the concept. The perspective here is heavily normative as it seeks to answer the core questions about who should do European memory and how they should do it. This dual objective might give the impression that I try to draw a fine line between the genealogical and the prescriptive parts, but in reality they are completely interconnected. Aspiring for a clear separation between facts and values, between descriptive and normative statements is not only theoretically problematic, but also politically irresponsible. Every statement is partly descriptive and partly prescriptive at the same time, and attempting to separate these two aspects only renders one blind to the normative assumptions that necessarily form part of “purely descriptive” statements, and to the empirical observations that necessarily form part of “purely normative” statements. Such blindness, in turn, renders one ignorant about the potential political implications of one’s statements, and this is irresponsible. I nevertheless find that asking separate questions about the “is” and the “should be” of European memory is useful in guiding the enquiry provided that I remain conscious about the interconnected and inseparable nature of the two sets of questions.

### **Variations of the Idea of European Memory**

The two more “descriptive” research questions are answered using interpretivist methods. The first step in this direction is to give substantive interpretations of the research questions themselves (in positivist research, this would be called the operationalisation phase where particular theoretical concepts are translated into measurable variables). Interpreting the question about who does European memory, which practically delimits the field of analysis, required me to make some particularly difficult decisions. The first dilemma is determining what doing European memory actually means. If a European institution is promoting the dissemination of a certain historical narrative that is supportive of European integration, is it “doing” European memory? Or if a politician is calling for the Europe-wide commemoration of a past event, is he/she contributing to the “making” of European memory? If I said that these activities indeed “do” European memory, this would have two negative implications. First, labelling these activities as “doing” European memory would imply that I have a relatively clear preconception of what European memory can mean; this preconception, in turn, would necessarily prioritise certain practices as “doing” European memory and would ignore some other, less obvious, ones. Second, if any representation of historical events above the national level could be considered as the making of European memory, it would potentially encompass such a wide range of different activities that it would be difficult to say anything meaningful about them. For these two reasons, I have decided to limit the scope of the enquiry to utterances that actually use the term “European memory.” It

must be noted that I do consider some important utterances that do not satisfy this condition; they are taken into account as part of the socio-political context or as precursors to the idea of European memory, but not as part of “doing” European memory itself. This criterion, of course, creates some problems of its own.

The introduction of this criterion allows me to focus on the social actors who actually use the concept and shape its meaning, and to remain open to its many different interpretations. However, simply limiting the enquiry to occurrences of the term “European memory” is not very helpful for several reasons. First, the term is used in many different ways; the phrases “European collective memory,” “Europe’s memory,” “Europe’s collective memory,” “memory of Europe,” “collective memory of Europe” are invoked in discussions as frequently as European memory and may or may not be interchangeable. Another problem is that in the plural the term might mean something substantially different from the singular. In a particular understanding, “a European memory” might very well be just one of the several “European memories,” whatever these are. But talking about “the European memory” might imply a belief in a single consensual narrative shared by all Europeans which stands in contrast with a “European memories” conception which might imply a plurality of narratives without broad consensus. A related issue is that of the definite and the indefinite article. Speaking about “the European memory” as opposed to “a European memory” makes a huge difference. To complicate things, the term is often used without article as “European memory.” The fourth source of ambiguity is that the memory in “European memory” might refer to a wide range of types of memory (such as personal, collective, literary memory). Finally, the part “European” is also open to broad interpretation. It can be understood in purely geographical terms in which case a European memory means a memory within the geographical boundaries of Europe; but “European” might also imply some degree of community so that European memory is based on something more complex than an arbitrarily defined geographical space.

To illustrate the problems involved in determining the scope of research, let us consider the book *European Memories of the Second World War*<sup>10</sup> from 1999. At first sight, this might be an early occurrence of the phrase in academia but, on closer inspection, one notices that this is less obvious. Its title actually refers to personal and literary memories in Europe. The term “European memories” is used twice in the whole book<sup>11</sup> which suggests that it did not play an important role as an independent concept. Nevertheless, it must also be noted that “European memory,” albeit

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<sup>10</sup> Helmut Peitsch, Charles Burdett, and Claire Gorrara, eds., *European Memories of the Second World War: New Perspectives on Postwar Literature* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Confirmed by search in Google Books. Cases when the title of the book is mentioned are not taken into account.



mentioned only once in this scholarly work, appeared in a context that gives it a certain weight. In the very last paragraph of the book, Louisa Passerini asserted that “[i]t is through a new compassionate understanding of our common past and of past enmities and conflicts that the construction of a European memory of the war becomes possible.”<sup>12</sup> Here, the concept clearly stands out from the preceding parts of the book, but it still remains an isolated occurrence of the phrase; the author does not attempt to link this concept to any wider discussion about the idea of European memory. Trying to pin down the singular point in history when the concept “originated” does not make much sense and is anyway irrelevant for understanding how the debate about the idea of European memory has evolved. If we are interested in the debate, isolated occurrences such as the one mentioned in this paragraph do not need to be considered.

For the reasons explained above, only considering utterances of the exact phrase of “European memory” is not open enough in some respects (as it excludes some closely related phrases such as memory of Europe or European collective memory), but it is too open in others (as it includes a host of widely different utterances, some of which would have little connection to each other, such as a personal memory and the representation of an unrelated historical event in a literary work). Therefore, if the condition about the utterance of the term “European memory” is to be of any use, some additional qualifying criteria are necessary. The dilemma again is about striking a good balance between breadth and depth. Some additional criteria are needed, but these should not amount to a substantive conceptualisation of European memory which would dismiss too many interpretations of the concept by definitional *fiat*. A good compromise in this regard could be reached if I return to the initial puzzle, to the question about how the current debate about European memory has evolved over time. What separates this systematic debate from the casual, sporadic use of the concept is the transnational element. Considering European memory as having a certain transnational character is what distinguishes the current debate from the earlier “memory in Europe” uses. Adding this transnational criterion also means that the condition about the use of the term “European memory” can be relaxed to allow for the inclusion of the very close variants of the concept (such as memory of Europe or European collective memory).

An issue that still remains is the linguistic differences. The problem is not only that discussion about European memory could be taking place in all the twenty-four official languages of the EU (or even more), but that certain terms are not completely equivalent in different languages. For instance, there is only an imperfect correspondence between memory and *mémoire*.

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<sup>12</sup> Louisa Passerini, “Memories of Resistance, Resistances of Memory,” in *European Memories of the Second World War: New Perspectives on Postwar Literature*, ed. Helmut Peitsch, Charles Burdett, and Claire Gorrara (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 296.

Due to the limitations of my own language skills and to the observation that most of the transnational debate about European memory occurs in a handful of languages, I will concentrate on English sources, which is the *de facto* common language of the EU, and complement them with French and German sources where appropriate. My assumption is that a serious intervention in the debate about European memory would try to make an impact in at least one of these languages.

### Who Does European Memory?

Based on the considerations explained in the previous section, Chapter 6 answers the question about who does European memory; it also delimits the scope of the debate about European memory, identifies its most important arenas and the sources of information. In the following, I will give a brief introduction to the history of the concept by summarising four interrelated trends that I observed. First, the idea of European memory has been most widely discussed in academia and in EU institutions. Several private initiatives have set out recently to strengthen the “European perspective” on history<sup>13</sup> and national history museums also seem to be more and more “Europeanised,”<sup>14</sup> but the usage of the term “European memory” has been reserved to these two interconnected (and sometimes overlapping) fora. Among others, the fact that there is virtually no trace of national newspapers using this term seems to support the claim that the debate is heavily dominated by, and so far constrained to, the “top” (the intellectual and political elite). More broadly, the rise to prominence of the idea of European memory can be considered to be part of the “memory boom.”<sup>15</sup> Our times are often described as a “mnemonic age,”<sup>16</sup> an “age of apology,”<sup>17</sup> an “age of shattered time.”<sup>18</sup> For good or ill, the obsession with memory<sup>19</sup> has indeed become a factor to count with in most societies, and memory studies is considered by many as an emerging academic field in its own right.<sup>20</sup>

Second, the discussion of the idea of European memory has not only been quite technocratic, but the concept has also assumed prominence relatively recently. Within academia, historians have been particularly active in addressing this problem with the earliest relevant works

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<sup>13</sup> For instance, Musée de l’Europe (Brussels) or Unitas Foundation (Tallin).

<sup>14</sup> Wolfram Kaiser, Stefan Krankenhagen, and Kerstin Poehls, *Exhibiting Europe In Museums: Transnational Networks, Collections, Narratives, and Representations* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 9.

<sup>16</sup> Bell, “Agonistic Democracy and the Politics of Memory.”

<sup>17</sup> Mark Gibney et al., eds., *The Age of Apology: Facing Up to the Past* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 137.

<sup>19</sup> Andreas Huyssen, “Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia,” *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2000): 26.

<sup>20</sup> Henry L. Roediger and James V. Wertsch, “Creating a New Discipline of Memory Studies,” *Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008): 9–22.

in this field dating from the early 2000s. There have been isolated occurrences of the term earlier, of course, but the specific debate about the idea of European memory has only emerged in the last decade. In the European political arena, the idea of European memory has become important since the late 2000s, but some initiatives emerged in the early 2000s which can be considered to be the precursors of the idea. The Stockholm Declaration (2000) played a crucial role in transnationalising the commemoration of the Holocaust. It was in sharp contrast to earlier less successful attempts at commemorating the end of the Second World War and its atrocities such as the Bitburg affair of 1985 and the commemorations hosted by the Polish and German presidents in 1995. Also, it has been an important point of reference for subsequent transnational attempts at commemorating mass killings ever since. The first EU initiatives to introduce some “memory politics” at the European level were put forward in the mid-2000s. Some of them failed. Unlike the generally forward-looking texts of previous treaties, the preamble of the rejected European Constitution (signed in 2004) already made a number of references to a common European heritage.<sup>21</sup> In 2005, the European Parliament (EP) discussed and finally dropped the idea to ban the use of totalitarian symbols. It also encouraged the adoption of 27 January as a European Holocaust Memorial Day, but this attempt became redundant when the General Assembly of the UN made this day an international remembrance day.<sup>22</sup> Other less ambitious initiatives, however, succeeded in the following years when a series of resolutions were adopted commemorating certain historical events of the twentieth century: the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe (RWW2), the twenty-fifth anniversary of Solidarity, the tenth anniversary of Srebrenica, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the Holodomor. In the first two of these resolutions, the EP explicitly referred to European memory. The idea of European memory became even more central a few years later. In 2008, a loose network mainly composed of politicians and academics signed the Prague Declaration (PD) and called for the establishment of an Institute of European Memory and Conscience. Its agenda was largely absorbed by the EP a year later when it adopted the Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism (RECT), proclaiming 23 August as European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism and proposing the establishment of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience (PEMC).<sup>23</sup>

The third observation to make is that, over the course of the last decade, the idea of European memory has quickly gained popularity in EU institutions, has made its way into official

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<sup>21</sup> Its drafters drew “inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe” and were “convinced that, while remaining proud of their own national identities and history, the peoples of Europe are determined to transcend their former divisions and, united ever more closely, to forge a common destiny.”

<sup>22</sup> To be fair, it did become an official European Parliament event.

<sup>23</sup> Other European international organisations have also adopted documents on memory issues. See Council of Europe Resolution 1481 (2006) and the Vilnius Declaration of the OSCE (2009).

EU documents and has become a key concept of orientation for five European institutions, broadly defined: the European Parliament, the Reconciliation of European Histories Group (REHG), the Platform of European Memory and Conscience, the Europe for Citizens programme (ECP), and the House of European History (HEH). The Reconciliation of European Histories Group is an informal group of forty-one members of the European Parliament (MEPs). It has close connections to the Platform, an educational project linking governmental and nongovernmental organisations. The Europe for Citizens programme is an initiative of the European Commission which aims to promote European citizenship. The House of European History is a developing museum due to open in May 2017. It is important to consider that its latest conception explicitly defines the project as a “reservoir of European memory”;<sup>24</sup> this is a significant conceptual change as previous EU exhibition projects, such as the Schengen Museum (2010), the Parlamentarium (2011) and even the earlier conceptions of the House of European History, had more conventional organising principles. The conceptions of European memory that these five institutions put forward will be analysed in Chapter 7.

Finally, the concept of European memory has come to play a central role in the East-West memory divide or the “European memory wars”<sup>25</sup> which have been allegedly raging since the Eastern enlargement of 2004. The memory wars are supposed to stand for the heated debate between the “East” and the “West,” between the countries on the opposing sides of the former Iron Curtain, about what the appropriate memory for Europe should be. At the heart of this conflict is the question about the extent to which the Holocaust and other historical atrocities, such as Stalinist terror and communist oppression, can be mentioned on the same page. In the mid-2000s, when the commemoration of the Holocaust achieved transnational status with the UN General Assembly decision mentioned above, many believed that the Holocaust could become a common memory for Europe. This was opposed by some, mostly Eastern European conservative, politicians and intellectuals on the grounds that an exclusive emphasis on the Holocaust would not do justice to the victims of other totalitarian regimes. While very few of them questioned the “uniqueness” of the Holocaust openly by declaring Nazism and communism “equally criminal,”<sup>26</sup> they did argue that paying too much attention to the victims of the Holocaust comes at the expense of the victims of other totalitarian regimes; this means that the latter are effectively treated as second-class victims. I show that the Group and the Platform are important fora in shaping and

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<sup>24</sup> European Parliament Directorate-General for Communication, “Building a House of European History” (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2013), 31.

<sup>25</sup> Dan Stone, *Goodbye to All That? The Story of Europe Since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 285.

<sup>26</sup> Sandra Kalniete quoted in Stefan Troebst, “Halecki Revisited: Europe’s Conflicting Cultures of Remembrance,” in *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*, ed. Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 60.

promoting this anti-communist agenda. This reasoning is opposed by many different groups, and most vehemently by the Western European far-left, who believe that it illegitimately relativizes the Holocaust and falsifies history by equating communist regimes with Nazism. At the extreme, intellectuals from the East accuse the West of ideological colonisation<sup>27</sup> and Western intellectuals accuse the East of promoting their own victimhood narratives instead of acknowledging their complicity in the Holocaust.<sup>28</sup> European memory has become the key concept of these memory wars where the debate is about what historical events the consensual memory for Europe should consist of and how these events should be treated with respect to each other.

## Methodology

The second “descriptive” question about how European memory is done relies on the analysis of openly accessible texts produced in the two arenas identified as influential in the debate about the concept, namely academia and European institutions. By the latter, I mean the work of the EP and the four EU-related initiatives mentioned in the previous section which are active in the debate about European memory.

The first step is to identify different conceptions of European memory, their relationship and their relative strength to each other within these fora. Then I analyse the most prevalent approaches to the idea of European memory in turn and determine different aspects of each conception. I pay particular attention the following aspects:

- the conceptualisation of the terms “Europe,” “memory” and “European memory”;
- the ethical values embedded in a certain conception;
- the goals that the idea of European memory should achieve;
- the means by which it should achieve these goals;
- the importance of historical debates in the conception;
- the focus of the historical debates that are deemed important by the conception.

Once these aspects of a certain approach to the idea of European memory have been identified, I critically evaluate the conception by looking at the internal contradictions between its different aspects and by confronting these aspects with my own theoretical arguments outlined in Part I. Given all the ambiguities and the subtle differences in the meaning of the term that have

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<sup>27</sup> Maria Mälksoo, “The Memory Politics of Becoming European: The East European Subalterns and the Collective Memory of Europe,” *European Journal of International Relations* 15, no. 4 (2009): 656.

<sup>28</sup> Aline Sierp, *History, Memory, and Trans-European Identity: Unifying Divisions* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

been discussed above, paying attention to the context in which the idea is invoked is crucial. For this reason, I find the critical discourse analysis of Ruth Wodak, based on the concept of context, particularly inspiring. The triangulatory approach produces interpretations by looking at the following levels:

1. the immediate context (“text-internal co-text”)<sup>29</sup>
2. intertextuality (“the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships ... between utterances, texts, genres and discourses”)<sup>30</sup>
3. the context of the situation (“the extralinguistic social/sociological variables, the history and archaeology of an organization, and institutional frames of a specific context of situation”)<sup>31</sup>
4. “the broader socio-political and historical contexts.”<sup>32</sup>

The aim of interpreting different conceptions of European memory is to infer from each conception the six aspects of interest which forms the basis of critique. In the process of interpretation, it is also important to be sensitive to silences and omissions.<sup>33</sup> This is especially important in the case of European memory as public debate about historical events is marked by taboos and silences, as what is commemorated is just as important as what is left unrepresented. Moreover, triangulation is not only necessary between the different contextual levels, but also between different types of sources of information. This means that the research is a continuous cross-referencing between and within primary and secondary sources. Lastly, I set the time frame of the analysis as broad as possible. This means that the observations are up-to-date as of the finalisation of the text, that is, the end of 2015. The only exception is the analysis of the membership of the Reconciliation of European Histories Group; I used the membership information form 31 May 2014 as many members lost their mandate after the EP elections of that year.

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<sup>29</sup> Ruth Wodak and Michal Krzyzanowski, eds., *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Meyer, “Between Theory, Method, and Politics: Positioning of the Approaches to CDA,” in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (London: SAGE, 2001), 29.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Huckin, “Textual Silences and the Discourse of Homelessness,” *Discourse and Society* 13, no. 3 (2002): 347–72; Thomas Huckin, “On Textual Silences, Large and Small,” in *Traditions of Writing Research*, ed. Charles Bazerman et al. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 419–31; Kieran O’Halloran, *Critical Discourse Analysis and Language Cognition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003).

## Contribution

My work contributes to two scholarly debates. Part I is a general theoretical discussion about pluralist mythscapes, while Part II is a contextualisation of this theory in the contemporary European politics of the past. Part I aims to strengthen the ongoing “third wave” in memory studies that encourages self-reflection about the theoretical foundations of the field. It outlines a comprehensive pluralist account of identity-constitutive mythologies that builds on the idea of radical democracy which regards conflicting visions of the past not as an anomaly that needs to be overcome by rational consensus or as an asset that can be harvested in order to bolster the legitimacy of certain political bodies. This vision takes difference to be an inevitable condition of social life, and instead of trying to overcome conflict, it argues for its nature to be changed so that competitive antagonistic relationships can become more peaceful agonistic ones through dialogue and education. Part I intervenes in the general debates about the conceptualisation of and the social theory behind collective memory and myth, and about the ethical standing of constitutive mythologies. Chapter 2 contributes to the conceptual discussions within memory studies; it presents a comprehensive critique of the most important conceptualisations of collective memory and argues that the unreflective use of the term might obscure more than it reveals about the social world. For this reason, it proposes to restrict the use of the terms “memory” and “collective memory” to practices that are rooted in experience, and to use concepts such as myth and mythscape for talking about publicly represented identity-constitutive historical narratives. Chapter 3 considers the most common social theoretical frameworks embedded in accounts of myth and memory, and outlines the backbone of a theory in which mythical structures and agents can be meaningfully thought of as co-constitutive. Finally, Chapter 4 considers the normative issues related to myths; it highlights the shortcomings of the prevailing duty-based moral philosophical approaches and explains what the mythscape might look like in an agonistic democracy based on Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of dialogue.

Building on this theoretical basis, Part II opens up new perspectives within European studies. Its aim is to understand and critically evaluate how the idea of European memory has been conceptualised by different actors at the European level and to develop a novel, pluralist conception. Chapter 5 examines the scholarly discussion of the term; it first explores the more general theoretical frameworks with which academics have made sense of the concept, then looks at the role that academic research has played in the European memory wars. Chapter 6 sets the historical context of the empirical enquiry, examines the process through which the idea of European memory has gained importance, and identifies the major arenas in which it has been discussed. The aim here is not to point at a single “origin” of the concept but to delineate the

scope of empirical research by understanding who were involved in “doing” European memory. Chapter 7 analyses and criticises how the actors identified as important use the concept of European memory. The conclusion draws on all the previous chapters to determine what a pluralist European mythscape would look like, and to explain why it is needed.

## **Personal Experiences and Motives**

As a conclusion of this introductory chapter, I feel that it is important to acquaint readers with my personal experiences and motivations that compelled me to work on European memory and that in many ways inform my general attitude to the subject matter. I would like to be open about the ideological-experiential baggage that I bring with myself to the discussion of the topic at hand especially because my critical and interpretivist scholarly approach implies that there is no such thing as a non-normative, value-free social scientific enquiry. If we accept this, attempting to keep a distinction between the supposedly subjective personal motivation and the supposedly objective academic enterprise, as followers of the positivist tradition do, becomes nonsensical. The personal motives of the researcher to undertake the scholarly enquiry and the framework of interpretation used by the researcher during the enquiry form a single, indivisible whole. Indeed, if “[t]heory is always *for* someone, and *for* some purpose,”<sup>34</sup> it must also be *by* someone *for* some purpose. Knowing the second “someone” (the author) and its objectives is just as important as (and is intimately interconnected with) knowing who the theory is for and for what purpose. The fact that I was brought up in transitional Hungary plays a decisive role in structuring my personal motivation for engaging with, and my thinking about, memory in general and the idea of European memory in particular. It is my belief that telling the reader my little story would help in the understanding of my arguments and of the position that I speak from. The following is thus my own “personal myth” which I have no intention to portray as an account of what “actually happened.” Similarly to the political myths that will be discussed later in the dissertation, it is best to view it as a creative re-interpretation of the past (or rather, what I think about as part of the past) for the purposes of the present.

Until 2006, until the age of nineteen, I lived in Hungary in a small village, Szada, some twenty-five kilometres from Budapest. In the last eight years, I commuted to the capital every workday to attend secondary school and I practically only went back to my village to sleep. This arrangement meant that most of my formative teenage years were actually spent in Budapest, but it also meant that my attachment to either the capital or the village was only ever partial. While the possibility of being part of social life in the capital always seemed ever so close and ever so far at

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<sup>34</sup> Cox, “Social Forces, States and World Orders,” 128.



the same time, I felt more and more alienated from, but also unavoidably embedded in, my little prison of a village. The paradox of the relative proximity and remoteness of both worlds, in both literal and metaphorical senses, was and still is a defining experience for me.

The contrast between the rural environment and the capital could have hardly been starker, especially with respect to identity-constitutive mythologies. To put it simply, the central historical narrative of the liberal-cosmopolitan intelligentsia of Budapest seemed to be the Holocaust with particular emphasis on the active involvement of the Hungarian state and of different parts of the society. On the other hand, the “trauma” of the Trianon Peace Treaty, as a result of which Hungary lost much of its territory after the First World War, was a crucial point of reference for the particularistic and nationalistic rural tendencies. Not surprisingly, the evaluation of the period that connects the two historical events, the regime of Miklós Horthy, is the most heated point of the debate (or rather, the dialogue of the deaf) between the two camps.

This generalising distinction between urban-liberal and rural-nationalist camps is certainly an oversimplification. What I do state is that there is little doubt that this cleavage with respect to identity-constitutive mythologies does exist in the Hungarian society and I attempt to present here how my perceptions of this debate structured my interest in, and my way of thinking about, the wider issue addressed in the dissertation.

Personally, I would like to see people in Hungary subscribe to a liberal-cosmopolitan interpretation of events, take a regretful approach towards the Holocaust and generally pay more attention to the shameful parts of the past than to glorious and heroic deeds. However, I am aware that this set of preferences is by no means the single historically or morally right one. In fact, they are largely influenced by my prior ideological preferences, by the more general assumptions about the social world and myself. If I had another way of looking at the world and myself in it, I would certainly view things differently. The point here is that the historical narrative that I take to be valid and important, my historical “belief,” is intimately interconnected with my other, more general ideological “bets.”

After a certain time, after realising the contingency of all of this, instead of propagating my historical “belief,” I became much more interested in why this debate is not working well, why the two sides are deaf to each other’s arguments. The two camps mutually accuse each other of continuing the tradition of the perpetrators, of refusing to acknowledge the suffering of the other, and of trying to marginalise the memory of the other. I was particularly fascinated by how both sides could think about the other as emotional, irrational and ultimately the falsifier of history. The most extremist positions could be heard in everyday conversation. At one extreme, outright

irredentist and bordering anti-Semitic comments which portrayed the liberals of the capital as corrupted, “anti-Hungarian” (*magyarellenes*) and “traitors of the nation” (*nemzetárulók*) were never far from the nationalist-particularistic rural environment. At the other extreme, many of these very liberals, who were supposedly universalist-cosmopolitan and aware of their privileged status, seemed to feel nothing but contempt for the nationalists, as if they had fallen outside the scope of universalism for some reason. Expressions that stem from the discredited colonial thinking about the modern-backward dichotomy (such as primitive, savage, brute) are now rightfully taboo in the liberal vocabulary (probably the only exceptions when these adjectives are still acceptable are blatantly illiberal practices such as female genital mutilation). Strangely, these same expressions are used by liberals all too readily to describe “exclusionists.” Experiencing this general inability of liberalism to meaningfully engage with “exclusionary” views, its habit of labelling them irrational or worse, and its penchant for the “never tolerate intolerance” mantra was as important a motivation for me to seriously engage with the topic of memory as my complete disagreement with the nationalist-particularistic views.

As I delved deeper and deeper into the field known as “memory studies,” I soon realised that the phenomenon of mutually exclusive views is not unique to the Hungarian case at all; for instance, the European memory wars exhibit very similar traits. In general, debates about the public representation of past events have a tendency to develop into a dialogue of the deaf; this is a situation where the participants do not only disagree sharply about what exactly should be represented, but they all pursue the same exclusionary logic that outright rejects the right to existence of the narratives of the other participants. As I will demonstrate in the theoretical chapters of Part I, at the heart of this exclusionary logic lie several assumptions about the existence of a singular historical and moral truth and about the possibility of knowing (or at least approximating) these truths with the human capacity of reason. Through the intellectual journey of this PhD, I have become convinced that far from bringing greater clarity to the debate and from offering a framework within which differences can be resolved or tolerated, these assumptions themselves are the very reason for the deadlock. Debates about the public representation of historical narratives all too often take place with the wrong assumptions and on the wrong level of abstraction. In this dissertation, my main goal is thus to question these deeply ingrained assumptions and to shift the focus of the debate from a fixation on historical details to more abstract and fundamental issues about the nature of historical knowledge and about the ethics of the public representation of historical events; in this debate taking place at a more abstract level, I aim to intervene by providing a political theory of myth that advocates an agonistic approach to identity-constitutive historical narratives instead of the currently dominant antagonistic tendencies.

The objective is to overcome the competitive relationships, where the participants regard each other as enemies who they need to destroy, and to make way for a more peaceful dialogue, where the participants see each other as adversaries who they need to engage with and understand.



# PART I

## Pluralist Approach to Myth

There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me.

King James Bible, 1 Corinthians 14:10-11

...there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.

William Shakespeare

*Hamlet*

This is not freedom, but a question of how to work the trap that one is inevitably in.

Judith Butler

*The Body You Want* (1992)



## 2

### The Misleading Metaphor of Memory

Memory is a notoriously ambiguous concept. Any decent account of memory starts with a lengthy and complicated attempt at cutting a path through the conceptual jungle. Scholarly discussions in which memory remotely plays a role range from neuroscience through history and social studies to philosophy. However, as the “type” of memory relevant for the analysis of the idea of European memory is that of collective memory, I will concentrate on how this (still all too vague) notion has emerged and evolved in academia and, through a critique of the concept, propose clarifications and limitations on its use.<sup>35</sup> The following is not a comprehensive overview of the vast collective memory literature. It instead relies on a number of important selected theoretical accounts which allow us to understand general patterns in the literature even in this necessarily truncated and simplified version. Many of the issues with the concept of collective memory that I will raise have been voiced before and fortunately memory studies seem to be more and more responsive to these criticisms. Some have even argued that a third, more theoretically and methodologically conscious, wave in memory studies is in the making. While it remains to be seen whether this wave will be successful, in the following three chapters I aim to contribute to this development with specifying a comprehensive pluralist approach to myth.

In this chapter, I first provide an overview of the literature on the concept of collective memory. I argue that no matter how carefully we define the term, the strong organicist connotations of the word “memory” mean that the concept of collective memory often obscures more about the social world than it reveals. For this reason, I argue that the use of the term “memory” should be restricted to the limitations of the individual mind, while other terms, such as collective remembrance and myth, should take its place in the social realm. I conclude by

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<sup>35</sup> For comprehensive reviews of the literature on collective memory, see Barbie Zelizer, “Reading the Past against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12, no. 2 (1995): 214–39; Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, “Social Memory Studies: From ‘Collective Memory’ to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24, no. 1 (1998): 105–40; Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007); Jeffrey K Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, eds., *The Collective Memory Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

highlighting the relationship between myth and identity, and by extending my conceptual framework to the transnational level of analysis.

## Understanding Collective Memory

The term “memory” originally meant the individual cognitive capacity of registering and recalling. For the ancients, *ars memoriae*, the art of memory, stood for the highly valued principles and techniques that could help improve the ability of memorising and recalling learnt things. This is now viewed as only one type of memory. Today psychologists distinguish between implicit memory (that is unconscious and unintentional), and explicit or declarative memory (that is conscious and intentional). “[P]rocedural memory, what is learned as bodily skill and habit,”<sup>36</sup> is a form of implicit memory that allows people to conduct their basic everyday activities (such as riding a bike) without thinking. Explicit memory can be subdivided into episodic memory (the memory of past events that happened to a person) and semantic memory (“general knowledge and facts [that are learned] about the world”).<sup>37</sup>

The term “collective memory” was coined by Maurice Halbwachs. Dissatisfied with the individualistic treatment of memory in Freudian psychology of trauma and in Henri Bergson’s philosophy of consciousness, Halbwachs emphasised the importance of the social in memory processes. He claimed that the “idea of an individual memory, absolutely separate from social memory, is an abstraction almost devoid of meaning.”<sup>38</sup> For Halbwachs, collective memory meant the representations of the past that are shared collectively by members of a group who arrive at these representations through everyday communication. Collective memory is therefore socially mediated and rooted in communication with other group members who “conceive their unity and particularity through a common image of their past.”<sup>39</sup> Halbwachs was a student of Émile Durkheim and relied heavily on his structuralist sociological framework. The end of the nineteenth century is often thought about as the first wave of the “memory boom” and Peter Burke suggested that the construction of national unity through traditions, rituals and monuments that was characteristic of this era had a direct impact on Durkheim’s (and through him, on Halbwachs’s) thinking. The “sociology of Emile Durkheim, with its emphasis on community, consensus and cohesion, itself bears the stamp”<sup>40</sup> of this period. In the light of this, it is not surprising that

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<sup>36</sup> Stephan Feuchtwang, “Memorials to Injustice,” in *Memory, Trauma and World Politics. Reflections on the Relationship Between Past and Present*, ed. Duncan Bell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 177.

<sup>37</sup> Helen L. Williams, Martin A. Conway, and Gillian Cohen, “Autobiographical Memory,” in *Memory in the Real World*, ed. Gillian Cohen and Martin A. Conway (Hove, UK: Psychology Press, 2008), 21.

<sup>38</sup> Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 37.

<sup>39</sup> Jan Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995): 127.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Burke, “History as Social Memory,” in *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind*, ed. Thomas Butler (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1989), 106.



Halbwachs put so much emphasis on social unity; his belief that a “society can live only if there is a sufficient unity of outlooks among the individuals and groups comprising it” seems to be as much prescriptive as descriptive.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, the language according to which a society is conceived as an actor that “does” things, it remembers and forgets, is rooted in his works and is still dominant in memory studies. In his words, a “society tends to erase from its memory all that might separate individuals, or that might distance groups from each other ... rearranges its recollections in such a way to adjust them to the variable conditions of its equilibrium.”<sup>42</sup> The unreflective use of this figurative language, and the fact that Halbwachs neglected to specify how individuals internalise collective memories, opened the way towards problematic jumps between the individual and the social levels of analysis.

According to the mainstream narrative within memory studies, the second memory boom originated in the US in the 1980s and supposedly reached its peak in the mid-1990s.<sup>43</sup> Some scholars, such as Jeffrey Olick, dispute whether the obsession with memory has ever waned or left us in the last few decades. The prominent academics studying this second memory wave were influenced by Halbwachs’s work but also tried to refine his propositions and to rectify the problems mentioned above. An important conceptual innovation was introduced by Jan Assmann who tried to address a major shortcoming in Halbwachs’s framework by distinguishing between communicative and cultural memory. Communicative memory for Assmann was what Halbwachs theorised about and analysed under the title of collective memory, the “varieties of collective memory that are based exclusively on everyday communications ... [and] constitute the field of oral history.”<sup>44</sup> As such informal memories pass from generation to generation, these representations of the past have a limited lifespan, usually three to four generations or eighty to a hundred years. Assmann realised that “once we remove ourselves from the area of everyday communication and enter into the area of objectivized culture, almost everything changes.”<sup>45</sup> Halbwachs neglected the realm of organised communication, but the “transition is so fundamental that one must ask whether the metaphor of memory remains in any way applicable.”<sup>46</sup> Assmann suggested that it does; as “a close connection to groups and their identity exists which is similar to that found in the case of everyday memory... In this sense, objectivized culture has the structure of memory.”<sup>47</sup> Detached from the everyday, cultural memory is transcendental in character and thus its time

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<sup>41</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 182.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 182–183.

<sup>43</sup> Allan Megill, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error: A Contemporary Guide to Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 42.

<sup>44</sup> Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” 126.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

horizon is different from that of collective memory. Cultural memory “has its fixed point; its horizon does not change with the passing of time. These fixed points are fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance).”<sup>48</sup>

Similarly to Assmann, Richard Ned Lebow contrasted Halbwachs’s idea of collective memory with a form of memory that resides in the realm of organised communication. However, for Lebow, the latter is institutional memory that “describes efforts by political elites, their supporters and their opponents to construct meanings of the past and propagate them more widely or impose them on other members of society.”<sup>49</sup> It is clear from this definition that Lebow departed significantly from Assmann’s concept of cultural memory. Institutional memory is constructed and propagated (or imposed) by the agents of the memory discourse, who are clearly identified as political elites, and thus institutional memory has no transcendental character.

Olick also realised that Halbwachs’s original theoretical treatment of collective memory conflates “two distinct, and not obviously complementary, sorts of phenomena” and that this stems from the insufficient attention Halbwachs paid to the transition from the individual to the social. On the one hand, his collective memory concept can denote individual, albeit socially framed, memories; collected memory, in Olick’s understanding, is the aggregate of the individual memories of the members of a group. On the other hand, Halbwachs’s collective memory notion can mean collective representations of past events; collective memory, in this narrower sense, belongs to the objective (or at least, intersubjective) cultural realm. According to Olick, the problem is that “collective memory” is all too often used indiscriminately to refer to both types of phenomenon while these two forms of memory “seem to be of radically distinct ontological orders” and to presuppose “two radically different concepts of culture.”<sup>50</sup> Building on the seminal work of Almond and Verba,<sup>51</sup> the collected memory tradition posits that political culture can be understood as “a subjective category of meanings contained in people’s minds.”<sup>52</sup> In contrast, interpretivist scholarship views political culture to be “the patterns of publicly available symbols objectified in society”<sup>53</sup> which means that collective memory has a certain autonomy of its own (it is not reducible to its individual members). Olick thought that paying attention to these two

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Ned Lebow, “The Memory of Politics in Postwar Europe,” in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, ed. Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 13. Note that Lebow also mentioned individual memory, the subject of psychological and psychoanalytical studies.

<sup>50</sup> Jeffrey K. Olick, “Collective Memory: The Two Cultures,” *Sociological Theory* 17, no. 3 (1999): 336.

<sup>51</sup> Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

<sup>52</sup> Olick, “Collective Memory,” 336.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

mutually incompatible understandings of “memory” would be a necessary step towards greater conceptual clarity in the field.

These conceptual innovations have been highly influential and scholarly contributions to memory studies have indeed become more conscious about the limitations of the term “collective memory” and more cautious with its use. While in the late 1990s Winter and Sivan lamented that many still “use the term ‘memory’ as if it were unproblematic”<sup>54</sup> and argued for “a more rigorous and tightly argued set of propositions about what exactly memory is,”<sup>55</sup> recently Erll and Feindt et al. have even argued that it makes sense to talk about a third wave in memory studies that is more self-reflexive about its conceptual and theoretical underpinnings.<sup>56</sup> Despite these efforts, the language that portrays societies as capable of having “memories” and of “remembering” or “forgetting” historical experiences, on the one hand, and as being composed of memory “producers” and “consumers,” on the other, is still prevalent in scholarly and lay discussions. I label the former language organicist and the latter instrumentalist. In the following, I will explain why these figurative forms of speech are misleading and how we might overcome this problem.

### **Collective Memory as a Misleading Metaphor**

The most common criticism of Halbwachs’s idea of collective memory in particular, and the underlying Durkheimian understanding of society in general, is that they are based on a naturalistic and organicist thinking that treats societies as organic wholes, as organisms in the biological sense. They view social processes as analogous to individual ones, with the only difference being that they take place on a different scale.

There are two consequences of this sociological assumption. One is anthropomorphism. Collectives are endowed with attributes and properties which are usually thought of as belonging to human beings. Societies and groups, in this organicist thinking, “are said to remember, to forget, and to repress the past; but this is done without any awareness that such language is at best metaphorical and at worst misleading about the phenomenon under study.”<sup>57</sup> Wulf Kansteiner thought that the problem with this is primarily methodological; he was concerned that, due to the simplified analogy between individual and collective memory processes, “the threshold between the individual and the collective is often crossed without any adjustments in method.”<sup>58</sup> Some

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<sup>54</sup> Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, eds., *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 11.

<sup>55</sup> Winter, *Remembering War*, 50.

<sup>56</sup> Erll, “Travelling Memory”; Feindt et al., “Entangled Memory.”

<sup>57</sup> Wulf Kansteiner, “Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies,” *History and Theory* 41, no. 2 (2002): 185–186.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

collective memory research indeed relies too much on individualistic psychoanalysis and psychiatry; it extrapolates from the individual so that it can explain the social. Jeffrey Alexander showed the inadequacy of this type of scholarship with respect to the idea of social trauma which will be explained later in this chapter.<sup>59</sup>

The other consequence of the organicist assumption about collectivities is that they are regarded as cohesive wholes, their cultural sphere is seen as monolithic and too much emphasis is put on unity and consensus. Considering the nation-state dreams of the late nineteenth century, Durkheim's social theory and Halbwachs's idea of collective memory are understandable. On the one hand, it is empirically dubious that such a high level of social cohesion is indeed how Society (with a capital S) works; on the other hand, it is ethically questionable that this organicist assumption effectively reinforces the belief in the primordial nature of national communities to the detriment of other, less privileged, social groups. While both Durkheim and Halbwachs underplayed the possibility of differences of opinion and conflicts of interest within communities, the small but significant differences between their ways of thinking should not be overlooked. Coser remarked that where "Durkheim speaks of 'Society' with a capital S, Halbwachs speaks of 'groups'—a more cautious usage";<sup>60</sup> according to Olick, this suggests that Halbwachs was more aware of the possible plurality of memories that can underpin social differentiation.<sup>61</sup>

In this organicist framework, not only is "the community" treated as a given, but its memories are also regarded as social facts, as something objectively "out there." Olick referred to this view as the "misleading substantialism of an outdated social science."<sup>62</sup> He believed that the more contemporary term "mnemonic practices" is better suited to describe the "fluid process" that the construction and reproduction of representations of past events really are. Bell is right to point out that this process "relies heavily on institutional mediation, political manipulation, and active agency,"<sup>63</sup> all important factors that are completely neglected in the organicist understanding of collective memory. Most problematically, understanding "collective memories" as immovable Durkheimian social structures that mould individual identities leaves no room for agency, for the possibility of creative and self-reflexive action by social actors. At the other extreme, Marxist scholars, such as Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, overemphasise the role of agency by

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<sup>59</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The Meanings of (Social) Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>60</sup> Lewis Coser, "Introduction," in *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 22.

<sup>61</sup> Olick, "Collective Memory," 334.

<sup>62</sup> Jeffrey K. Olick, ed., *States of Memory: Continuities, Conflicts, and Transformations in National Retrospection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 6.

<sup>63</sup> Bell, "Agonistic Democracy and the Politics of Memory," 149.

assuming that political elites have nearly perfect control over the representations of the past.<sup>64</sup> I label this approach instrumentalist because it thinks about historical representations as the means by which those in power can legitimate and consolidate their authority. This tension between structure-oriented organicism and agent-oriented instrumentalism are at the heart of social theoretical debates which will be addressed in the next chapter.

As noted in the previous section, more recent conceptualisations of collective memory have attempted to address these problems with Halbwachs's original framework, most notably the unjustified (and unjustifiable) leaps from the individual to the social (and back). Assmann, Lebow and Olick tried to resolve the issues by conceptual innovation; they hoped that distinguishing between individual memory processes, everyday small-scale conversation (communicative or collective memory) and organised communication (cultural or institutional memory), between collected and collective memory, would lead to more clarity in memory studies. These developments are certainly welcome, but unfortunately the organicist language is still predominant in memory studies. I argue that the reason for this is that the notion of "memory," irrespective of the adjective with which we use it, is too intimately connected with the individual mental capacity of remembering and organicist thinking. Above all, the application of the term "memory" in the social realm is a misleading metaphor. Assmann has recognised that this transition from the individual to the social is "so fundamental that one must ask whether the metaphor of memory remains in any way applicable."<sup>65</sup> He and others who have tried to save the concept of collective memory have reasoned that the metaphor does remain applicable. While admitting that the term itself "structures (that is, both enables and constrains) our conceptual and empirical work,"<sup>66</sup> Olick upheld that it makes sense to understand collective memory as "merely a broad, sensitizing umbrella, and not a precise operational definition. For upon closer examination, collective memory really refers to a wide variety of *mnemonic products and practices*, often quite different from one another."<sup>67</sup> Indeed, calling public representations of past events "memories" already prejudices our thinking in a number of ways and we need to consider what, if anything, is to be gained from submerging a wide range of social processes in the term "collective memory." I am of the opinion that, even if we pay attention to use it carefully, the concept of collective memory has so strong organicist connotations that it obscures more than it reveals about the social world.

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<sup>64</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>65</sup> Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," 128.

<sup>66</sup> Olick, "Collective Memory," 334.

<sup>67</sup> Olick, "From Collective Memory to the Sociology of Mnemonic Practices and Products," 158.

For the advocates of a third wave in memory studies, collective memory has come to be seen not as a thing that is actually out there in the real world, but as an “operative metaphor,”<sup>68</sup> as a heuristic tool with which we make sense of social phenomena. If we are indeed so pragmatic with respect to concept formation, if we define concepts in a way that they become useful for making sense of the world, why are we still clinging to the concept of memory? If we can do away with concepts such as cultural trauma for their highly problematic jumps between individual and social levels,<sup>69</sup> why cannot we do the same with “collective memory”? I agree with Reinhart Koselleck that only individuals should be understood to “have” memories and applying the concept outside the realm of the individual mind is a misleading metaphor that should be rejected.<sup>70</sup> It is misleading mostly because it obscures our vision to the problem of agency, that is, to the question about who does the remembering. Even Halbwachs admitted that “[w]hile the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember.”<sup>71</sup> If this is so, how can individuals “remember” events that have happened far away from their lives in terms of space and/or time? They might remember hearing about these events or learning about them, but surely they do not remember them as lived experiences. To say that we remember the Holocaust is a metaphorical figure of speech that is highly misleading. None of us remembers the First World War simply because we were not alive at that time. I agree with Samuel Hynes that for the “images and stories in our heads that constitute our versions of other men’s wars we must find some other term. And there is a perfectly good one at hand: what we do, when we summon up our common notions of what the First World War was like, ... we evoke our shared myth of the war.”<sup>72</sup>

For the above reasons, the terms memory and remembering should not be subject to the misleading metaphorical usage according to which collectives can remember and individuals remember events that they have never experienced. This misleading language has been all too often used unreflectively so that memory has come to “represent a whole host of different social practices, cognitive processes and representational strategies and what gets submerged, flattened

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<sup>68</sup> Astrid Erll, “Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction,” in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 4.

<sup>69</sup> Wulf Kansteiner and Harald Weinböck, “Against the Concept of Cultural Trauma,” in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 229–40.

<sup>70</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, “Gebrochene Erinnerung? Deutsche Und Polnische Vergangenheiten,” in *Deutsche Akademie Für Sprache Und Dichtung: Jahrbuch 2000*, ed. Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2001), 19–20; Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand, *Imagining Europe: Myth, Memory, and Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 48.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Coser, “Introduction,” 22.

<sup>72</sup> Samuel Hynes, “Personal Narratives and Commemoration,” in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 206–207.

out, is the nuance, texture and often-contradictory forces and tensions of history and politics.”<sup>73</sup> Following Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan,<sup>74</sup> Duncan Bell advocated a social agency approach that recognises that memory is an individual capacity and is rooted in experience. Importantly, Bell did not claim that “the mind is a hermetically-sealed entity, untouched by the social context in which it is situated”; on the contrary, “[m]emory relies to a large degree on pre-constituted discursive elements, images, vocabularies.”<sup>75</sup> Memory is “the socially-framed property of individual minds ... an individualistic psychological phenomenon *in so far* as it is a phenomenon that only individuals can possess properly.”<sup>76</sup> Memory should not be understood as a substance that “can transcend the individual consciousness and enter into the public realm, outside time” and that is “transferable (as memory) to those who have not experienced the events that an individual recalls, which means that it cannot be passed down from generation to generation.”<sup>77</sup> In this framework, the only social practice that can be considered “truly” mnemonic is collective remembrance, when individuals who have experienced the same particular event, who have lived through the same particular time come together and discuss their experiences. Collective remembrance is thus limited by time and space and can only take place within the lifetime of those experiencing a particular event. Shared representations of past events, for which the metaphor of “collective memory” stands, remain very important, of course; however, they “should not be regarded as truly mnemonic. Instead, they should be conceived of as mythical.”<sup>78</sup> It is crucial to note that “truly mnemonic,” in this sense, does not mean that memories rooted in experience are “real” memories and shared representation of past events are “unreal.” Nothing can be further from my argument than a conceptualisation of memory that follows the logic of a correspondence theory of truth, that aims to delineate the single right “thing” out there in the world that memory *really* is. On the contrary, I make a case for a pragmatist conceptualisation influenced by Richard Rorty that recognises that metaphor is an essential tool with which we make sense of the world, we connect two hitherto unrelated referents, we can render the unknown familiar; but it also recognises that not all metaphors are the same, that they influence our thinking differently, that the effects of some metaphors on our thinking are more constraining than enabling, that some metaphors are particularly misleading while others are less so. What I argue for is not that the concept of memory is a metaphor, but that it is highly misleading to use the same term for what is rooted in the

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<sup>73</sup> Duncan Bell, “Mythscape: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity,” *British Journal of Sociology* 54, no. 1 (2003): 71.

<sup>74</sup> Winter and Sivan, eds., *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*.

<sup>75</sup> Bell, “Mythscape,” 72.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

experience of agents and what is the socially shared representation of past events. The latter in my framework should thus not be understood to be mnemonic.

Naturally, not everyone shares the view that the language of memory not rooted in experience can only be misleadingly metaphorical. According to Eviatar Zerubavel, “the ability to experience events that had happened to groups and communities to which we belong long before we joined them as if they were part of our own past ... is an indispensable part of our social identity.”<sup>79</sup> I disagree with this position. When one is aware of committing the mistake of talking about remembering something that had happened before they were born, the issue might be no more serious than sloppy language, a metaphor that opens the possibility for all sorts of misunderstandings. Confusing learnt and lived experiences unknowingly, however, is in fact a deeply disturbing psychiatric condition. In his treatment of psychosis, James Glass elaborated on the case of Ruth, the daughter of a Holocaust survivor.<sup>80</sup> Following behavioural patterns learnt from his father, Ruth talked about the horrors of the concentration camp as if she had really been there, as if she had really experienced the suffering as a prisoner. Is this the type of “sociobiographical memory” that Zerubavel had in mind when he claimed that “what we ‘remember’ includes more than just what we have *personally* experienced”?<sup>81</sup> The examples he enumerated (the sense of suffering of many African Americans whose ancestors were slaves or the sense of guilt many Germans feel about the Holocaust) are certainly very close. The question is, of course, whether the people Zerubavel talked about truly lose their sense of self in recalling slavery or the Holocaust, whether they truly believe that they were there as he claimed. I find this a highly dubious proposition. The idea of an “existential fusion of our own personal biography with the history of the groups or communities to which we belong”<sup>82</sup> is confusing.

The real world effects of research based on these underlying assumptions of the idea of “sociobiographical memory” are also ethically questionable. “It too often assumes that which it is supposed to explain”<sup>83</sup> which leads us to the performativity critique of the organicist understanding of collective memory. By treating “mnemonic communities” and their memories as given and viewing social responses to past events as organic and natural, research conducted in this vein reinforces and naturalises contingent social arrangements and it legitimates the “bogus naturalism of memory makers.”<sup>84</sup> Many works in memory studies attempt to describe how “societies

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<sup>79</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel, “Social Memories: Steps to a Sociology of the Past,” *Qualitative Sociology* 19, no. 3 (1996): 290.

<sup>80</sup> James M. Glass, *Private Terror/Public Life: Psychosis and the Politics of Community* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

<sup>81</sup> Zerubavel, “Social Memories,” 289.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

<sup>83</sup> Bell, “Agonistic Democracy and the Politics of Memory,” 149.

<sup>84</sup> Olick, *States of Memory*, 6.



remember,” how commemorative practices change over time, while they fail to question the very social forces that bring these “memories” about. Assuming a false “observer” position, they disregard the way their assumptions and terminology reinforce the very social structures and power positions that their work is supposed to explain. As Bell noted, the “existence of a ‘collective memory’ should not be the starting point of investigation or ethical stipulation. Rather, in attempting to grapple with ethical questions about the uses of the past it is vital to analyze the dynamics of popular historical consciousness and the ways in which particular ‘collective memories’ come to be formed and reproduced, the social and political roles they perform (whether intentionally or not), and the modes of inclusion and exclusion they sanction.”<sup>85</sup>

Finally, the last critique of the organicist collective memory literature concerns research focus, namely the preoccupation of works on “memory” with nationalism and national identity. Representations of the past are certainly important for most (if not all) nationalisms, but memories and myths are not reducible to nationalist movements. Students of collective memory often focus exclusively on myths important for national identity and seem to forget that other political ideologies and other types of communities require the same type of founding narratives to serve as the symbolic basis for their cohesion. The disproportionate scholarly attention that has been paid to nationalist founding narratives, while often ironically subscribing to the assumption that their importance is diminishing, has resulted in a skewed understanding of the mythological landscape. A related problem is that works in memory studies usually take the form of national case studies and cross-country comparisons. The fact that this is the most common level of analysis in the social sciences is not a good enough reason for always unreflectively focusing on narrow national discourses. Again, this preoccupation is not simply methodologically problematic, but it also reinforces the assumption that it is naturally within national mnemonic communities that “memories” emerge and remembering takes place. The scholarly practice of talking about unitary “national memories” stems from this type of thinking which does not take into account the diversity and the plurality of the representations of past events within societies and social groups. In the last decade, this fixation on “national memories” has been challenged by the rise of the concept of transnational memory which will be explained later in this chapter.

## **Memory and Myth**

All the problems associated with the concept of collective memory which were discussed in the previous section suggest that, at the very least, it should be employed with prudence. I even propose that we should altogether refrain from a language that is “at best metaphorical and at

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<sup>85</sup> Bell, “Agonistic Democracy and the Politics of Memory,” 149.

worst misleading”<sup>86</sup> in favour of other, more precisely defined and less misleading terms. On the face of it, this is merely a semantic issue. Words, however, never merely describe the world around us; they have real effects, they enable and constrain (in one word, structure) our thinking. The term collective memory is problematic in many ways: it suggests that groups possess the psychological ability to remember and to forget and that individuals can remember events that they have not experienced; “the very term substantializes what is in fact a fluid process.”<sup>87</sup>

Notwithstanding these problems, for some scholars it is not obvious that the concept of collective memory should be abandoned as they believe that it still has some distinct advantages. According to Burke, the dilemma is that if “we use terms like ‘social memory’ we do risk reifying concepts. On the other hand, if we refuse to use such terms, we are in danger of failing to notice the different ways in which the ideas of individuals are influenced by the groups to which they belong.”<sup>88</sup> Burke did not explain, however, why he thought that memory is the best term to remind us of this influence. We should thus restrict the phenomenon of memory and the capacity to remember to individuals and to the events that they personally experience. Collective remembrance should be considered to be the only mnemonic practice that can be conducted in groups and other public representations of past events should be considered mythical. Myths, in this sense, are “highly simplified narratives ascribing fixed and coherent meanings to selected events, people, and places, real or imaginary. They are easily intelligible, transmissible, and help constitute or bolster particular visions of self, society, and world.”<sup>89</sup> Myths are publicly represented identity-constitutive historical narratives. Naturally, the term myth has its own problematic connotations, but these can be much more easily remedied than the misleading metaphor of memory. First, myth needs to be carefully differentiated from the way it is used in everyday conversation where it is usually understood to stand for a false belief, an untrue story; myth can be based on false or unsupported historical claims, but not necessarily. Moreover, this understanding is different from that associated with the instrumentalist approach which views myths as centrally imposed on people in order to legitimate certain social and political arrangements. Lastly, myth is often employed in anthropological accounts to refer to uncontested and incontestable narratives that ground the origins of a community. However, this definition unnecessarily narrows down our understanding of constitutive mythologies as it is primarily applicable in more traditional communities. In modern societies, identity-constitutive myths often, but not always and not exclusively, tell a tale about the origins of a group; the sacred is still very

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<sup>86</sup> Kansteiner, “Finding Meaning in Memory,” 185.

<sup>87</sup> Olick, *States of Memory*, 6.

<sup>88</sup> Burke, “History as Social Memory,” 99.

<sup>89</sup> Bell, “Agonistic Democracy and the Politics of Memory,” 151.

much present, but its transgression is usually sanctioned quite differently than in traditional communities. A more detailed theoretical justification for this conceptualisation will be provided in the next chapter, and a more nuanced categorisation of myths will be given in the following chapters.

The proponents of the concept of myth have not been able to turn the tide in memory studies so far and many scholars even deny that myth constitutes a conceptual innovation at all. Many dismiss it as an “old-fashioned concept”<sup>90</sup> and an “older term.”<sup>91</sup> Older, however, does not necessarily mean less useful. Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam called the concept of memory “an act of intrusion ... jostling aside older yet still effective working terms, and unavoidably obliterating fine distinctions.”<sup>92</sup> Similarly, Rousso noted that “the concept of memory has been extensively interpreted to the extent that it now seems to define any kind of link between past and present.”<sup>93</sup> The broad understanding of myth explained above has a number of advantages over the concept of memory when it comes to the description of not truly mnemonic practices, to the collective representations of past events. Unlike the terms “collective memory” and “national memory,” myth does not give us the impression that there is a single, unconditionally accepted historical narrative in a group; instead, it constantly reminds us of the possibility of contestation and the importance of the underlying power dynamics. In Bell’s terminology, the dominant or governing myth in a society “coexists with and is constantly contested by subaltern myths.”<sup>94</sup> The “totality of myths within any given collective ... the discursive space in which the various myths of the collective are forged and challenged”<sup>95</sup> can be called the “mythscape.” The acknowledgement of the contested nature of the representations of past events is also possible within the collective memory framework, of course. Michel Foucault introduced the term “counter-memory,”<sup>96</sup> Yael Zerubavel talked in terms of master commemorative narratives and counter-memories,<sup>97</sup> while John Bodnar used the phrase “vernacular memories.”<sup>98</sup> These “memories with adjectives,”

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<sup>90</sup> Claudio Fogu and Wulf Kansteiner, “The Politics of Memory and the Poetics of History,” in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, ed. Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 285.

<sup>91</sup> Olick, “Collective Memory,” 334.

<sup>92</sup> Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam, “Collective Memory—What Is It?,” *History and Memory* 8, no. 1 (1996): 30.

<sup>93</sup> Henry Rousso, “The History of Memory: Brief Reflections on an Overloaded Field,” in *Clashes in European Memory: The Case of Communist Repression and the Holocaust*, ed. Muriel Blaive, Christian Gerbel, and Thomas Lindenberger (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2011), 232.

<sup>94</sup> Bell, “Mythscape,” 74.

<sup>95</sup> Bell, “Agonistic Democracy and the Politics of Memory,” 151.

<sup>96</sup> Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980).

<sup>97</sup> Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>98</sup> John E. Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

however, are still inadequate to resolve the problems associated with the misleading term that memory is. The advantage of reserving the capacity to remember to truly mnemonic practices is that we have a means to describe a situation when personal memory (that is, a socially framed narrative based on direct personal experiences with respect to an event) can be in opposition to the governing myth in a group or society. Instead of viewing memory as an instrument of cohesion in a community, personal memory can be an important element of resistance to mainstream representations of the past.

There are some ways Bell's social agency approach to myth can be fleshed out. First, we could consider the situation in which no myth is obviously dominant in a certain public discourse; it is perfectly possible to conceive of a duopoly or oligopoly of myths in which two or more identity-constitutive narratives of roughly equal strength dominate the mythscape. It is probably true that mythscapes with two or more competing nationalist myths are rare simply because in such a case it would make more sense to talk about two distinct national communities and two mythscapes; we need to bear in mind, however, that unresolved nationalist struggles for mythical dominance in entities that are considered nations are not as uncommon as they might appear at first<sup>99</sup> and that nationalist stories are not the only, and sometimes not even the most important, myths that define contemporary communities. For these reasons, we need to allow for the possibility of mythical duopoly and oligopoly as well.

Second, Bell mainly focused on the social level in order to challenge the totalising conception of "national memory," but his emphasis on plurality and contestation could also be extended to the subnational and the transnational levels. Let us start with internal group dynamics. There is no reason to believe that myths, which battle with each other at the social level, are uncontested within the group to which they belong. Most probably, the same dynamic processes of contestation and struggles for dominance take place within groups and sub-groups as at the higher, social level on which Bell focused. This does not mean that myths are necessarily challenged at every level. If no shared beliefs and no agreement on any fundamental issues existed, the contestation of myths could be regressed to such an extent that each individual would have his/her own, private myth. Assuming the presence of a certain degree of consensus along with contestation is thus also necessary to arrive at an adequate social theoretical background for constitutive

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<sup>99</sup> I thank Vsevolod Samokhvalov for suggesting Ukraine as a good example here. With almost exclusively Ukrainian-speaking Western and a predominantly Russian-speaking Eastern regions, Ukraine is a country where not only is it impossible to find the uncontested national narrative, but even the existence of a single dominant narrative is highly questionable.

mythologies. Bell's conceptual framework could also be extended to the transnational level which will be done in the last section of this chapter.

Last, some clarification is in order concerning group membership. People should not be assumed to belong to one group or another. More realistically, every person belongs to several groups and the intensity of the ties by which he or she is bound to them is different for each group and can vary over time. We can also say that an individual is influenced and in turn influences a multitude of mythical social structures. This intuition should also be incorporated in the social theoretical account of myth that will be discussed in the next chapter.

### **Memory, Identity and Nationalism**

Why does memory matter? A good deal of the collective memory literature sought to explain or understand the periodic upsurges of interest in memory and the persistent or ephemeral nature of this obsession. Answering this question would supposedly help us better understand whether and why memory is important for social life and why it is more relevant in certain historical contexts than in others. Halbwachs himself connected collective memory to group unity and self-understanding. Since then, with the rise of "identity talk," the notion that individual and group identities inevitably rely on memory has become a sort of received wisdom. The proposition that "shared experiences and memories ... provide distinctive identities to individuals and communities"<sup>100</sup> is often presented as a *fait accompli* which does not require any further explanation. The reasoning behind this, if provided, is usually very simplistic. The individual is constituted by his or her past experiences. Common sense tells us that what I was defines who I am. In psychology, the autobiographical memories of an individual, which are a combination of episodic and semantic memories, "constrain what the self is, has been, and can be in the future."<sup>101</sup> The way I see it, this type of thinking might work well for individual identity, but it is subject to the same caveat as Halbwachs's collective memory; it generalises too readily from individual to social processes. Some thinkers suggested that the reliance of identity on memories and myths might be more contingent than necessary<sup>102</sup> and that there is nothing natural about self-identification based on militancy (that is, defining the self with reference to the Other) and memory.<sup>103</sup> In my view, certain scepticism about the taken-for-granted identity-memory nexus is definitely a step in the

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<sup>100</sup> Lebow, "The Memory of Politics in Postwar Europe," 3.

<sup>101</sup> Williams, Conway, and Cohen, "Autobiographical Memory," 25.

<sup>102</sup> Jens Bartelson, "We Could Remember It for You Wholesale: Myths, Monuments and the Constitution of National Memories," in *Memory, Trauma and World Politics: Reflections on the Relationship Between Past and Present*, ed. Bell Duncan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 33–53.

<sup>103</sup> Jan-Werner Müller, *Constitutional Patriotism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

right direction, but it is true that it would be difficult to name group identities which do not rely on some sort of mythical foundations.

Many works explained historical variations in the public interest in memory within the identity-memory framework and placed the memory obsession(s) in grander historical narratives. Allan Megill asserted that “[w]e might postulate a rule: when identity becomes uncertain, memory rises in value.”<sup>104</sup> Pierre Nora claimed that “memory is constantly on our lips because it no longer exists.”<sup>105</sup> In his view, over time memory and the sacred have been expelled from society together with the nation as the foundation of identity; the recent “memory boom,” the struggle to uphold the traces of memory we have left, is no more than a substitute for real, lived memories. As humanity has moved from premodern times through modernity to postmodernity, we have gradually moved from a natural relationship with the past to artificial types of memory (such as distance-memory, duty-memory and archive-memory). Nora warned us that *lieux de mémoire* had replaced *milieus*. Another narrative has been suggested by Olick who proposed that we are undergoing a profound memory crisis similar to the one that occurred at the end of the nineteenth century. The difference is that whereas at that time the primary role of the memory frenzy was to strengthen nationalist sentiments, in our times the politics of regret has become the new grounds for legitimization. The term “politics of regret” originally meant “a variety of practices with which many contemporary societies confront toxic legacies of the past” in Olick’s understanding.<sup>106</sup> I have the impression that even he did not use the term consistently as in his writings it sometimes referred to all the institutions of transitional justice, sometimes only to state apology, and at other times to the “memory boom” in general. For my purposes, it is understood more narrowly as the process through which the public representation of certain problematic past events comes to be dominated by apologetic voices which usually acknowledge the role of the state or of wider society in certain atrocities and thus take some degree of responsibility for them. Olick claimed that, with the gradual decline of the nation state, legitimacy is no longer sought in referring to heroic golden ages, but in remembering the criminal past. Olick’s perspective thus “places memory and regret properly at the center of its sociological account of modernity.”<sup>107</sup>

Whatever the explanation for the memory boom might be, it is certain that regretful approaches to the past, and consequently victimhood narratives, are increasing in importance. The emergence of these types of myth is often explained by cultural trauma theory. What Alexander

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<sup>104</sup> Megill, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error*, 43.

<sup>105</sup> Nora, *Realms of Memory*, 1.

<sup>106</sup> Olick, *The Politics of Regret*, 122.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 130.

called common-sense or “lay” trauma theory thinks that certain events are inherently traumatic; the power to shatter emerges from the nature of the event itself and the traumatising of the individual, its feeling of being shattered, is a natural and immediate reaction to such an event. In this sense, social reactions to shattering events are seen as “natural” either because people are fundamentally good by nature, are shocked by bad experiences and aim to rationally solve the problem (Enlightenment version) or because they are unconsciously motivated by deep-rooted emotions and fears, and naturally react to disturbing experiences by repressing them (psychoanalytic version). In contrast, Alexander argued that there is nothing “natural” about such social reactions as no event is inherently traumatic.

Trauma is a socially mediated attribution. The attribution may be made in real time, as an event unfolds; it may also be made before the event occurs, as an adumbration, or after the event has concluded, as a post hoc reconstruction. Sometimes, in fact, events that are deeply traumatizing may not actually have occurred at all; such imagined events, however, can be as traumatizing as events that have actually occurred.<sup>108</sup>

Saying that trauma is socially constructed does not mean the trivialisation, the “relativization” or the rejection of victimhood claims. It is clear that any form of suffering and victimisation is terrible and deplorable. What this statement does mean is that the trauma (the victimhood identity) is not an automatic and immediate reaction to the shattering experience (the act of victimisation).

[W]hile victimisation is a harmful and occasionally violent act perpetrated upon a person or group, victimhood is a socially constructed identity, built—but not necessarily contingent—upon any particular perspective on that harm. Victimhood depends on a choice, however limited in its options, to use the experience of harm as the basis for identity, subject to the expectations of a political culture and its power relations.<sup>109</sup>

The social construction of the victimhood identity does not mean that it is an “invented tradition.” It may or may not have experiential basis, but admittedly it might be easier to construct a victimhood identity when the act of victimisation actually occurred. For instance, a central theme of Part II will be the European memory wars within which victimhood narratives that emphasise the suffering of Eastern European peoples under communism play an important role. Even though most of these myths are based on actual acts of victimisation, it does not follow that the experience was automatically converted to individual trauma which then naturally arose from the personal to the collective level. Victimhood identities need to be constructed and there is nothing

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<sup>108</sup> Alexander, *The Meanings of (Social) Life*, 91.

<sup>109</sup> Tami Amanda Jacoby, “A Theory of Victimhood: Politics, Conflict and the Construction of Victim-Based Identity,” *Millennium – Journal of International Studies* 43, no. 2 (2015): 527.

natural (or unnatural) about this process. There is nothing inherently good or bad about the social construction of these identities (in Eastern Europe and beyond), but it is a mistake to think that the supposed “iron laws” of human nature have anything to do with them. Therefore, talking about trauma on the social level is as organicist as talking about collective memories and it should also be rejected as a misleading metaphor.

## **Transnational Memory**

Finally, let us relax the assumption about hypothetical closed societies and examine the place of the concept of collective memory in a globalising world. The so-called “transitional turn” is starting to affect memory studies which have so far been preoccupied with national *lieux de mémoire*. As Aleida Assmann put it, this turn is fostering “a rethinking and reconfiguring of national memories in the context of transnational connectedness”<sup>110</sup> and it is leading to the emergence of the field of “transnational memory.” However, the metaphor of memory becomes especially burdensome when it is meant to stand for representations of the past that transcend national boundaries. In the literal sense, transnational memory is clearly nonsensical. How are we to remember something that is not only temporally, but also spatially far detached from us? How are we to remember something that happened on the other side of the world? In the more figurative sense, memories on the transnational level have been subject to a number of conceptualisations; the terms “cosmopolitan memory,”<sup>111</sup> “transcultural memory”<sup>112</sup> and “travelling memory”<sup>113</sup> have emerged in the last decade. On the one hand, these conceptualisations usually agree that memories on the transnational level are the result of new technologies, increased migration and larger interconnectedness. On the other hand, they depict these new “memories with adjectives” as generally positive phenomena in that they contribute to the understanding and the appreciation of different historical experiences and, in the case of the Holocaust, they can serve as a common platform for action in the interest of human rights. While the fact that memory studies is moving away from narrow-minded national frameworks is certainly a welcome and long overdue development, works on transcultural memory remain characterised by a lack of attention to agency. As Feindt et al. noted, citing solely new technologies as the driving forces behind the globalising trend risks downplaying the importance of human action and ultimately leaves little room for agency.

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<sup>110</sup> Aleida Assmann, “Transnational Memories,” *European Review* 22, no. 4 (2014): 546.

<sup>111</sup> Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

<sup>112</sup> Andrew Hoskins, “Media, Memory, Metaphor: Remembering and the Connective Turn,” *Parallax* 17, no. 4 (2011): 19–31.

<sup>113</sup> Erll, “Travelling Memory.”



Michael Rothberg presented a more nuanced picture. In developing his concept of “multidirectional memory,”<sup>114</sup> a term itself borrowed from network theory, he argued that the cross-referencing between memories that transcends national, ethnic, temporal and other types of boundaries is not a particularly new phenomenon, but one that has received relatively little attention so far. No memory regime has ever developed in isolation; general trends and common reference points have often spilled over boundaries and new communication technologies are not at all necessary for this productive “borrowing.” Moreover, and more importantly, Rothberg recognised that far from being unequivocally beneficial, this process can often produce social tensions and can even lead to violence. His main examples are the Holocaust and the colonialism discourses; he argued that these often produce mutually exclusionary accounts of victimhood that are pitted against each other in the public discourse, but this is not at all necessary to be the case. In emerging as what Levy and Sznajder called a “cosmopolitan memory,” the memory of the Holocaust has become a cornerstone of human rights activism, but it has also come into conflict with other, more local victimhood narratives. Especially in the case of the crimes of colonialism, some feel that the Holocaust memory crowds out their narrative of victimhood from the public space. This feeling of marginalisation is certainly not mitigated by the fact that the official Holocaust narrative is often coupled with claims of uniqueness and exclusivity. Rothberg found that the roots of the problem lie in the competitive logic that assumes that “the public sphere in which collective memories are articulated is a scarce resource and that the interaction of different collective memories within that sphere takes the form of a zero-sum struggle for preeminence.”<sup>115</sup> He called for a “shift in the conceptualization of memory from competition to multidirectionality”<sup>116</sup> because “far from blocking other historical memories from view in a competitive struggle for recognition, the emergence of Holocaust memory on a global scale has contributed to the articulation of other histories”<sup>117</sup> by providing a template for them. Importantly, while he maintained that “understanding memory as multidirectional is ultimately preferable to models of competition, exclusivity, and exceptionality,” Rothberg was self-reflexive enough to explore the crucial cases in which “memory’s multidirectionality functions in the interests of violence or exclusion instead of solidarity.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 11–12.

Rothberg's conceptual framework has been influential in the study of transnational memories. He is right in saying that the way we think about myths already influences the dynamics of our mythscapes. If the proponents of different victimhood narratives did not regard each other as rivals, but as allies, the interactions in that mythscape would be significantly different. It must be noted, however, that I do not mean to say by this that just because victimhood myths relate to each other differently, the public attention that each of them receive would necessarily and magically increase (for more discussion on this problem, see Chapter 4). Exactly because the way people think about the dynamics between public representations of the past is so important for Rothberg's theory, he should give special consideration to whether the concept of multidirectional memory is indeed the most suitable for his purposes. Indeed, I argue that the term "memory" is inadequate in this context as it reinforces the competitive logic that Rothberg sought to undermine. In the common-sense understanding, memory is certainly competitive; there are countless impulses craving for our attention because we as individuals can only internalise and remember a limited amount of information. More figuratively, the "remembering" is not done by an individual but by societies or groups through the "division of mnemonic labor";<sup>119</sup> even so, the metaphor of collective memory implies that a society or a group as a whole has a work to do and, as with any type of work, there is only a restricted amount of resources to do the "mnemonic labor." Therefore, framing public representations of the past in terms of collective "remembering" necessarily contributes to the development of a "competition of victims."<sup>120</sup> For a properly multidirectional understanding of transnational representational practices, Rothberg should consciously reject framing his argument in terms of the misleading metaphor of memory.

I have already explained how Bell's conceptual framework can be understood on subnational levels. Similarly, it can also be extended to the transnational scene. It makes sense to talk about transnational myths and transnational mythscapes as certain representations, tropes and representational strategies can become relevant outside national boundaries. New technologies certainly provide the means by which such myths can spread more easily, but agents remain crucial in the re-enactment of mythical structures. Once we extend Bell's framework to transnational and subnational levels, it is perfectly possible for a myth to be in a dominant position on one level and in a subaltern position on another. By this, I do not mean to suggest that these levels are hermetically sealed from each other and actually "exist" out there in the world. In fact, it makes sense to think about these levels as analytical systems of myth. Olick differentiated between the global, regional, national, local, familial, individual analytical systems which are "not merely nested

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<sup>119</sup> Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 58.

<sup>120</sup> Jean-Michel Chaumont, *La concurrence des victimes : Génocide, identité, reconnaissance* (Paris: Editions la Découverte, 1997).

like Matryoshka dolls, one inside the other, but ... the flows and effects of memory can leap between different orders, from system to system, in a wide variety of ways.”<sup>121</sup>

In this chapter, I have explored the issues with the term “collective memory” and proposed an alternative conceptual framework. The distinction between myth, collective remembrance and memory is useful because it reminds us of the importance of agency. In the following chapter, I will explain why it is crucial to pay attention to the problem of agency and how we should think about the relationship between mythical structures and social agents. This will effectively provide a social theoretical basis for the pluralist approach to identity-constitutive representations of the past and will also inform the discussion about ethics in Chapter 4.

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<sup>121</sup> Jeffrey K. Olick, “Foreword,” in *Memory and Change in Europe: Eastern Perspectives*, ed. Malgorzata Pakier and Joanna Wawrzyniak (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), xii.



# 3

## Reflexivist Social Theory of Myth

In the previous chapter, I contrasted organicist and instrumentalist approaches to collective memory based on what they think about the extent to which agents and structures determine each other. If we understand these labels as ideal types rather than the positions of actual scholars, we can say that organicism assumes that social structures “mould” agents, while instrumentalism posits that (at least certain) agents have complete control over their structures. I do not suggest that actual conceptualisations of collective memory clearly subscribe to one or the other of these extremes, but it is certainly the case that the Durkheimian-Halbwachsian framework overemphasises the importance of structural constraints, while the instrumentalist thinking assumes too much control of agents over their social world. In the following, I will explain a social theoretical framework that transcends this dichotomic thinking and sees social structures and agents as co-constitutive. This, in turn, will be the basis for a reflexivist social theoretical framework of myth.

I label this approach reflexivist for two reasons. According to the underlying social theoretical considerations, agents are believed to be capable of creativity, innovation and at least partial self-reflexivity; this means that to a certain extent they can critically reflect on their situation and on the social structures that shape them and are in turn shaped by them. Similarly, academics are also characterised by this limited reflexivity and their task is taken to be the use of their own self-reflexive capabilities with the aim of triggering self-reflection in their audience. The reflexivist understanding of myth is useful because it allows academics to be more effective at this task.

In this chapter, I will first briefly review the history of the concept of myth and of the agent-structure dilemma in the social sciences, and I will argue for a conception in which agents and structures are considered as co-constitutive rather than as dichotomous categories. I will then show how these social theoretical frameworks are currently present in the study of myth and collective memory, and will develop a reflexivist social theoretical approach to myth.

## A Brief History of the Concept of Myth

In the previous chapter, I stated that my understanding of myth differs significantly from its everyday usage which views myth as an unjustified and false belief that stands in opposition to the rational and the true. This differentiation between *mythos* and *logos*, the irrational-false and the rational-true, the “really made-up” and the “really real”<sup>122</sup> seems now to be self-evident, but the history of the concept of myth shows that this dichotomic thinking has evolved through a long and contingent process. In ancient Greece, the two terms were used interchangeably until the fifth century. At least until Plato, the term “myth” did not have any pejorative meaning or associations with falsity. Chiara Bottici demonstrated that the plurality of truths that ancient mythology provided came to be decisively denounced as deceptive with the rise of monotheistic religions, especially Christianity.<sup>123</sup> It was when *logos* began to be widely associated with the ultimate truth, the Word of a unique God, that the polytheistic mythical culture was condemned as untruthful and dangerous. The concept of myth took on further negative connotations during the Enlightenment when it was rejected “not just as untruth, but also as imaginary and thus unreal”; by this time, the distinction between *mythos* and *logos* became so strongly held that even “Romantic approaches to myth, with their call for a rehabilitation of myth understood as the vehicle for a divine revelation, simply invert[ed] the axiological value of the dichotomy of myth versus reason upon which Enlightenment itself rests, instead of radically questioning it.”<sup>124</sup>

Despite these contemporary negative connotations of myth, a number of different understandings of literary and political myths have emerged which do not regard them anymore as untrue. Instead, they define them in terms of their claim to represent the truth,<sup>125</sup> of how they are believed to be true,<sup>126</sup> or of their backward<sup>127</sup> or progressive<sup>128</sup> nature. Some have even understood the concept of myth so broadly that for them it effectively stands for all political symbols; Roland Barthes, for instance, conceptualised myth as a second-order semiological system.<sup>129</sup> I agree with Bottici and Benoît Challand that the use of the term should be more restrictive; we should understand myths as symbolic, but not all symbols should be understood as mythical.<sup>130</sup> I understand the term “myth” to stand for publicly represented identity-constitutive

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<sup>122</sup> Joanna Overing, “The Role of Myth: An Anthropological Perspective, or: ‘The Reality of the Really Made-Up,’” in *Myths and Nationhood*, ed. Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin (London: Hurst & Company, 1997), 1–18.

<sup>123</sup> Chiara Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>125</sup> Christopher Flood, *Political Myth: A Theoretical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>126</sup> Henry Tudor, *Political Myth* (London: Macmillan Press, 1972).

<sup>127</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946).

<sup>128</sup> Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>129</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Cape, 1972).

<sup>130</sup> Bottici and Challand, *Imagining Europe*, 89.

historical narratives. Consequently, they may or may not make historical truth claims, and they may or may not be historically accurate. Not any symbol, not any narrative and not any historical narrative is necessarily a myth. This conceptualisation is thus based on the assumption that not all statements need to claim to represent the singular and absolute truth in order to be constitutive of an individual's or a social group's identity. The search for meaning might be justifiably seen as a "human constant," but as the historical contingency of the development of the *mythos-logos* dichotomy shows, the desire to ground meaning in the exclusive and unique truth is definitely not. For this reason, identity-constitutive myths which do not make historical truth claims are conceivable. My argument is not that this conceptualisation is better at describing the features of corresponding real world phenomena, but that it is a potentially more useful way of "hooking onto the world" than other understandings of myth (or the notion of collective memory, for that matter). In the following, I will explain the social theoretical framework behind this understanding of myth and provide reasons why it is a particularly useful way of making sense of the social world.

### **The Agent-Structure Debate**

The agent-structure debate has been going on within, and sometimes across, various disciplines in the last forty years. In sociology, the concept of social structure was overwhelmingly viewed for a long time as a moulding form that shapes individuals and governs human behaviour. By positing that society cannot be understood as a mere aggregate of its individual members, this approach subscribes to a methodological holism that views the whole as more than the sum of its parts. The causal determinism of social structure came to be challenged within its home discipline in the 1970s. Norbert Elias, one of the first thinkers who tried to relax the agent-structure dichotomy, was well ahead of his time. *The Civilizing Process* was originally published in 1939 but received very little attention until it appeared in English in 1969.<sup>131</sup> Elias used the metaphor of a dance to explain the relationship between figurations (structures) and actors; a dance can only occur if the participants know the conventions of the dance, but it cannot take place independently of the actors. Pierre Bourdieu developed the concept of habitus in the *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, first published in French in 1972. He was among the first to attempt to reconcile semiotic and material conceptions of structure. In his understanding, habitus is a product of a complex relationship between mental structures and the world of objects. Anthony Giddens intervened in the emerging agent-structure debate with his *Central Problems in Social Theory*, published in 1979; he famously argued that "the notions of action and structure presuppose one another."<sup>132</sup> He coined

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<sup>131</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000).

<sup>132</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 53.

the term structuration to break with the static connotations of the word structure. Instead of the dichotomic thinking about agent and structure, his theory of structuration opted for “the duality of structure, ... the mutual dependence of structure and agency” which means that “the structural properties of social systems are both the medium and the outcome of the practices that constitute those systems... The identification of structure with constraint is also rejected: structure is both enabling and constraining.”<sup>133</sup> For this reason, Giddens projects agents that are enabled and knowledgeable, who are capable of acting in innovative ways and thus often affect the structure that enabled their action in the first place.

Sewell, “a theoretically self-conscious social historian”<sup>134</sup> in his own depiction, drew insights from important debates in a number of disciplines when he developed his own conceptualisation of structure and culture. He was at the centre of important changes within his own discipline, when political history gave more and more ground to social history, and later to cultural history. He actively participated in the agent-structure debate within sociology and also paid close attention to a similar controversy, when many anthropologists (such as James Clifford and George Marcus) turned against the prevailing understanding of culture, the discipline’s central concept, in the 1980s. I will present Sewell’s account of structure in detail and base my further argument upon it because I find Sewell’s theory the most successful at building on the pioneering work of Bourdieu and Giddens but also effectively addressing the shortcomings of their theories. Sewell set out the following goals to address three problems he identified with the notion of structure that is prevalent in the social sciences: “(1) to recognize the agency of social actors, (2) to build the possibility of change into the concept of structure, (3) to overcome the divide between semiotic and materialist visions of structure.”<sup>135</sup>

With respect to Giddens, Sewell accepted his notion of the duality of structure as “congenial” because it expresses well “how historical agents’ thoughts, motives, and intentions are constituted by the cultures and social institutions into which they are born, how these cultures and institutions are reproduced by the structurally shaped and constrained actions of those agents, but also how, in certain circumstances, the agents can (or are forced to) improvise or innovate in structurally shaped ways that significantly reconfigure the very structures that constituted them.”<sup>136</sup> However, Sewell, among many others, took issue with the vagueness of Giddens’s definition of structure (described at one point as “[r]ules and resources, recursively implicated in the

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>134</sup> Sewell, *Logics of History*, 127.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 128.



reproduction of social systems”).<sup>137</sup> Sewell actually preferred the term schema to rules because the latter “tends to imply something like formally stated prescriptions” whereas the semiotic side of structures should be understood as “informal and not always conscious schemas, metaphors, or assumptions presupposed by such formal statements.” For him, fixed and codified rules should be seen as resources, as “actual rather than virtual.” Schemas, on the other hand, are virtual as “they cannot be reduced to their existence in any particular practice or any particular location... They can be generalized—that is, transposed or extended—to new situations when the opportunity arises.”<sup>138</sup> Sewell was even more dissatisfied with the description of resources in Giddens’s theory. He felt that Giddens had wanted to distance himself from Lévy-Strauss’s purely rule-based understanding of structure in order to be able to account for power and social domination, but “tacking an undertheorized notion of resources onto an essentially rule-based notion of structure succeed[ed] merely in confusing things.”<sup>139</sup> Sewell clarified the concept of resources in the following way.

Resources are of two types, human and nonhuman. Nonhuman resources are objects, animate or inanimate, naturally occurring or manufactured, that can be used to enhance or maintain power; human resources are physical strength, dexterity, knowledge, and emotional commitments that can be used to enhance or maintain power, including knowledge of the means of gaining, retaining, controlling, and propagating either human or nonhuman resources. Both types of resources are media of power and are unevenly distributed. But however unequally resources may be distributed, some measure of both human and nonhuman resources are controlled by all members of society, no matter how destitute and oppressed. Indeed, part of what it means to conceive of human beings as *agents* is to conceive of them as *empowered* by access to resources of one kind or another.<sup>140</sup>

Based on this, Sewell claimed that structures have a dual character not just in the sense that they create agents and are in turn constituted by agents, but in the sense that they are “composed simultaneously of schemas, which are virtual, and of resources, which are actual. If structures are dual in this sense, then it must be true that schemas are the effects of resources, just as resources are the effects of schemas.”<sup>141</sup> This dual conception is especially important in order to overcome “both the material determinism of traditional Marxism and the ideal determinism of traditional French structuralism.”<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), 377.

<sup>138</sup> Sewell, *Logics of History*, 131–132.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 133. Italics in the original.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

This might give the impression that “schemas and resources simply reproduce each other without change indefinitely”<sup>143</sup> so Sewell finally showed how his own framework can effectively account for change; for this, he compared his understanding of structure to Bourdieu’s notion of habitus. Sewell believed that Bourdieu also arrived at the conclusion that structures are of a dual nature as habitus is a product of the mutually reinforcing interaction between mental structures and the world of objects (schemas and resources in Sewell’s understanding), a process which in turn constitutes autonomous and knowledgeable human subjects.

Yet Bourdieu’s habitus retains precisely the agent-proof quality that the concept of the duality of structure is supposed to overcome. In Bourdieu’s habitus, schemas and resources so powerfully reproduce one another that even the most cunning or improvisational actions undertaken by agents necessarily reproduce the structure... Although Bourdieu avoids either a traditional French structuralist ideal determinism or a traditional Marxist material determinism, he does so only by erecting a combined determinism that makes significant transformations seem impossible... Bourdieu’s own theory has fallen victim to an impossibly objectified and overtotalized conception of society.<sup>144</sup>

According to Sewell, Bourdieu was right to insist on the reproductive nature of schemas and resources, but his concept of habitus is so unified and totalising that it cannot account for transformation that is not introduced from outside the society, but generated by internal forces. Sewell thus proposed the adoption of a “far more multiple, contingent and fractured conception of society”<sup>145</sup> and structure, and specified five sources of internally induced change. First, the multiplicity of structures can produce change as this implies that “the knowledgeable social actors whose practices constitute a society are far more versatile than Bourdieu’s account of a universally homologous habitus would imply: social actors are capable of applying a wide range of different and even incompatible schemas and have access to heterogeneous arrays of resources.”<sup>146</sup> Second, what can also account for the transformation of structures is the transposable quality of schemas which means that “they can be applied to a wide and not fully predictable range of cases outside the context in which they are initially learned.”<sup>147</sup> The transposability of schemas also implies that “the resource consequences of the enactment of cultural schemas is [*sic*] never entirely predictable”;<sup>148</sup> consequently, the unpredictability of resource accumulation is the third source of structural change. Furthermore, as any “array of resources is capable of being interpreted in varying ways and, therefore, of empowering different actors and teaching different schemas,”<sup>149</sup> the

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 138–139.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 142.

polysemy of resources can also lead to structural transformation. Lastly, since structures intersect and overlap in both dimensions (schemas and resources), a certain array of resources can be “claimed by different actors embedded in different structural complexes” and certain “schemas can be borrowed or appropriated from one structural complex to another”;<sup>150</sup> therefore, the intersection of structures is the fifth source of change.

Finally, Sewell clarified what room is left for agency in his framework. “To be an agent means to be capable of exerting some degree of control over the social relations in which one is enmeshed... Agency is implied by the existence of structures... Agency arises from the actor’s knowledge of schemas, which means the ability to apply them to new contexts ... agency arises from the actor’s control of resources, which means the capacity to reinterpret or mobilize an array of resources in terms of schemas other than those that constituted that array.”<sup>151</sup> Sewell argued that every human being is inherently capable of agency. However, this is a highly generalised capacity, which means that there are huge variations in the specific, culturally and historically determined, forms that agency takes. For this reason, we need to keep in mind that “agency differs in both kind and extent ... both between and within societies”; that structures “empower agents differentially”; that structures, “and the human agencies they endow, are laden with differences of power.”<sup>152</sup>

### **Reflexivist Social Theory of Myth**

In the following, based on Sewell’s theory, I will outline a reflexivist social theoretical framework of identity-constitutive mythologies and will contrast it to the ideal typical organicist and instrumentalist positions. An important theoretical innovation in Sewell’s theory is that he considered social structures in the plural. This is in accordance with the conceptual preferences expressed in the previous chapter that emphasise the plurality of myths. In contrast, scholarly approaches that think about the social structure in the singular tend to downplay such differences. Organicism and instrumentalism assume that mythologies are singular and all-encompassing. The singularity of mythology in this sense means that only one mythical system is considered within a society; this myth guarantees social coherence and dominates the entire discursive space which means that it is all-encompassing. Organicism thinks about myths by stressing their uncontested nature and their social standing above rational debate. Instrumentalism, on the other hand, views myths as produced by the members of the elite for self-interested and cynical reasons as part of

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 143–144.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 144.

the ideology projected by the ruling class. Contrary to the two previous approaches, the reflexivist account emphasises the plurality of myths and their necessarily contested nature. It claims that social structures should be considered as multiple and cultures as only loosely coherent. In the reflexivist framework, myths are plural and only aspire for discursive domination, while mythical monopoly is practically inconceivable. Note that contestation in this case does not necessarily imply, but may certainly involve, the scrutiny of the historical accuracy of mythical stories. Contestation here denotes the discussion and the dialogical relationship between competing interpretations of past events. This stems from the intuition that agents are capable and willing to challenge, as well as accept, mythical structures.

A fundamental difference between these three approaches is the assumptions that they make about human beings, that is, about how humans are and about how humans should be, which are intimately connected with the type of society that they would like to see. No matter how much more positivist-minded practitioners within these research traditions would like to think to the contrary, all of these frameworks are as much prescriptive as descriptive and they all have ethical positions deeply embedded in them. The underlying ethical idea behind the organicist view of human beings is that conforming to social norms and expectations can establish a sense of responsibility, continuity and security, that civility is the cornerstone of peaceful social existence. Instrumentalism explicitly condemns mythical structures because they are under the control of the ruling elite and keep the masses in a state of false consciousness. The reflexivist social theoretical framework, which posits a co-constitutive relationship between agents and structures, is no less value-laden than those theories which consider these forces in a binary and more deterministic way. It thinks that autonomous human action is not just a possibility, but a prerequisite of social life. The ideal here is the innovative, creative and self-reflexive individual who, in their ambivalent enabling and constraining relationship with structures, does not simply reproduce structural processes but is also able and willing to attempt to influence them.

There are substantial differences between these approaches with respect to what they think about how myths are sustained in a society, how much autonomy structures and agents have and what the intentions of the actors are. For organicism, an overarching mythical system that provides certainty and continuity for the members of a community is a necessity in social life. In order to compensate for the fragility of existence and reason, people need markers of certainty to carry on with their daily lives. Therefore, myths exist outside the realm of rational comprehension, they transcend the individual. In the instrumentalist framework, on the other hand, myths are sustained by the cynical, strategic and consciously manipulative actions of a self-interested elite. For them, culture is only an instrument of coercion, a tool used and discarded at will that has no

influence on its bearer. Most actual scholarly works oscillate between these two positions and allow for both “types” of reproduction of mythical structures. This is understandable given that, on the one hand, few would think that myths just “emerge” and “develop” naturally so that ultimately affective and emotional human beings, who do need and do believe these myths, can make sense of their worlds; on the other hand, most would find it simplistic to say that structures can simply be imposed from above by cynical manipulators. It indeed appears to be a simple solution to this dilemma to allow for the possibility of both explanations. We should bear in mind, however, that these are not distinct “pathways” to the reproduction of myths, both of which are possible in real life, but fundamentally incompatible ways of seeing the social world and individuals. Furthermore, even a “little bit of both” approach, which would posit that any given myth is sustained by a mixture of the social forces that transcendentalist and instrumentalist envision, is unsatisfactory because of the mutually incompatible assumptions of the two positions. For this reason, I argue that instead of trying to synthesise these two opposing explanations, we should explain the way myths are sustained in a community upon completely different theoretical grounds. In order to do this, we need to separate two related but distinct issues: the question about the motivation of social action and the problem of agency. For the reflexivist social theory, whether individuals act out of conviction and belief and/or for selfish or selfless reasons is irrelevant. The reason for action might be an important factor for ethical considerations, of course, but I argue that in order to develop a clearer understanding of how myths are sustained in a society or group, we need to move away from the preoccupation with individual motivation. What goes on inside individuals’ minds is not just futile to theorise about in the abstract, but it is also practically impossible to determine in any particular case. For these reasons, making assumptions about the extent to which people believe in the myth that they promote as a matter of principle and to which they promote mythical stories for strategic reasons provides only shaky grounds for a theory of myth. Once freed from the burden of trying to explain individual motivation, we can turn to the problem of agency, to the question about the extent to which people can act autonomously and to which they can reproduce and/or transform social structures.

A problem with the organicist-instrumentalist opposition in this matter is that both models essentially allow for only one type of human motivation. But belief and strategy need not exclude one another. In fact, it is more plausible that some people both firmly believe in a myth and use it strategically to advance their political goals. The desire to teach others what they believe to be true and the decision to popularise an ideology which may further their political career can easily have equal weights in their motivations. The opposition between unconditional belief by emotional individuals and strategic action by calculating actors thus misses the point. It is safe to say that motivations are always plural, meaning that the reasons for each person to uphold a myth may be more emotional than strategic, more driven by self-interest than belief, or both/neither of them may be relevant. Harald Wydra arrived at the same conclusion when he stated that “[p]eople and politicians often appear as utilitarian, shrewd, and cynical but also idealist, altruistic, and deeply emotional.”<sup>153</sup> Similarly, Bell did not think “that elites are somehow immune to the pull of the myths they help to perpetuate, for they are often shaped by them also.”<sup>154</sup>

Given the inherent plurality and ambiguity of intentions, however, is it necessary or even possible to base a theory of myth upon these grounds? Understanding individual motivation behind myths has been important for many thinkers. Wydra claimed that the task “is to understand the modalities of how actions or ideas are internally appropriated by the dominated and the led, by the interpreters and the people who experience social change, how they are lived through.”<sup>155</sup> Joanna Overing agreed that like “good Collingwood historians, our chore is to get into other people’s heads in order to perceive the universe as they understand it.”<sup>156</sup> But this is a very difficult task. Even if the researcher only deals with a single person or with members of a small group, it can be impossible to determine what the motivations for sustaining certain myths really are. The reason for this is not simply the methodological issue about knowing someone’s mind and about the conscious misrepresentation of intentions; attempts to discover the “true” motivations are doomed to fail not least because the justifications that people provide for their actions to themselves are inconsistent and shifting over time. When considering mythologies at the social level, however, an analysis aimed at revealing whether an immense number of people internalise, enact and transform myths for emotional or for strategic reasons would be most certainly futile. Moreover, knowing *why* myths are invoked by an individual tells us little about *how* they are sustained at the social level.

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<sup>153</sup> Harald Wydra, “The Power of Symbols: Communism and Beyond,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 25, no. 1–3 (2011): 66.

<sup>154</sup> Bell, “Agonistic Democracy and the Politics of Memory,” 165.

<sup>155</sup> Wydra, “The Power of Symbols,” 66.

<sup>156</sup> Overing, “The Role of Myth,” 5.

For the reasons mentioned above, I argue that a reflexivist theory of myth would treat the problem of agency separate from that of motivation and would use a co-constitutive structure-agent conception outlined in the previous section so as to understand how mythical social structures are sustained. In Sewell's theory, social structures shape, constrain and enable agents who in turn constantly reproduce, sustain and challenge existing structures. Here, the reason for social action is not relevant for understanding its social effects. Agents do not exist outside the structures that enable and constrain them, but they nevertheless retain a degree of autonomy and their actions are as important for maintaining social structures as these structures are important for them. It is certainly true that the "horizon of affect and meaning ... is one toward which the actor can never be fully instrumental or reflexive."<sup>157</sup> We must nevertheless realise that a lot of room needs to be left for human creativity. What is more, reflexivity and innovation are not mere theoretical possibilities for which we should allow, but are just as important for sustaining social structures as conformity and the, often unconscious, acceptance of social norms and shared categories of thought.

Therefore, when it comes to the question of agency, the reflexivist position would necessarily depart from the organicist and instrumentalist theories without seeking to synthesise them. Both ideal typical accounts project an image of the cultural sphere as a homogenous and coherent system where the ruling mythology is unconditionally incorporated by the masses. In the organicist framework, individuals have no autonomy at all; mythologies inevitably develop and emerge and are consequently reproduced almost automatically in everyday life. In instrumentalist theories, the elite have full control over the mythscape; the historic bloc propagates its ideology in order to retain its hegemonic status and its members are mostly in control of the consequences of their actions. However, as Marshall Sahlins noted,<sup>158</sup> the use of a symbol always puts that symbol at risk; due to the uncertainty with regard to the consequences of practice, each use of a symbol potentially inflects and transforms its meanings. This is not to reject the possibility of manipulative intentions or to suggest that these efforts are in fact futile; they most likely have an impact on discourse which is favourable to the actor in question. This argument does suggest, nevertheless, that developments in the cultural field are ultimately beyond the full control of agents and that the almost automatic reproduction of structures that organicism envisions is unrealistic. The effect of the enactment of myths is always uncertain and a reflexivist approach to myth should accommodate this uncertainty.

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<sup>157</sup> Alexander, *The Meanings of (Social) Life*, 12.

<sup>158</sup> Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

As mentioned in the previous section, the unpredictability of the outcome of the enactment of cultural schemas is only one source of structural change. The fact that mythical structures are multiple and intersect also implies the possibility of change, and so do the polysemy and the transposability of resources. Who actually make these changes in the mythscape happen, however, are social agents who are empowered by structures and are also constrained by them. Agents are assumed to be creative in the sense that they can apply schemas learned in one context to new and unexpected situations, and that they have control over a variety of resources which they combine and use in a variety of innovative ways. They belong to different social groups in different ways which means that they are enabled and constrained by different mythical structures in different ways. Importantly, agents are endowed with the capacity to self-reflect which means that, to a limited extent, they can critically reflect on their own social structures and, in limited ways, they can aspire to change these structures if they find them unacceptable. However, there are many differences between agents; they are empowered by structures in different ways which leads to great differences in power. Consequently, the elite has a special role in reproducing and changing social structures; “due to the nature of power relations within societies, elites will have a major role in the perpetuation of particular mythologies.”<sup>159</sup> However, this privileged role certainly does not mean complete or exclusive control over the mythscape; the elite cannot completely control the mythscape and it is not only the elite that influences the mythscape (and in most cases the elite is certainly not a homogenous social group with unified interests and goals). The instrumentalist logic that separates “memory producers” and “consumers” is in fact doubly problematic. It is not only empirically questionable, but it also reinforces power differences and the differential access to resources by effectively portraying the non-elite as passive dupes who uncritically receive mythical content.

Finally, different theoretical accounts see the social function of myths differently. For organicism, myths are a necessary condition for normal social life; without them, social harmony and peace are not even conceivable. As shared images of the past and markers of certainty, they provide cohesion for a community and allow people to understand the world around them. Instrumentalist accounts agree that myths are a cohesive force, but they argue that this cohesion is not in the interests of those who are bound together this way. They are misled and suffer from false consciousness as they internalise values and interests that are contrary to their own. Therefore, the social cohesion provided by myths is in fact coercive. The ultimate function of mythologies is then to enforce conformity to the demands of the ruling elite, and to mask and

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<sup>159</sup> Bell, “Agonistic Democracy and the Politics of Memory,” 165.



mystify the interests of those in power. Here, myths are not only socially unnecessary, but they are a social anomaly. Given its emphasis on the plurality of myths and on a mythscape characterised by both consensus and contestation, the reflexivist approach holds that myths can help consolidate a given social or group order, but they are also important in challenging these. Myths are double-edged swords: they simultaneously bind with some people and alienate from others, legitimate an authority and undermine others, enable and constrain social action. Because of the ambivalent nature of myths, the reflexivist social theory cannot make simple statements about the desirability or the undesirability of particular myths based on their social functions. To make normative judgements about myths and mythscapes, a more detailed ethical account is required which will be given in the next chapter.



## 4

### Pluralist Ethics of Myth

In this chapter, I build on the conceptual and social theoretical basis of the previous chapters in order to develop a pluralist ethical framework. In his “ethics of myth,” Bell already outlined what a mythscape might look like in an agonistic democracy.<sup>160</sup> The theorisation that follows is inspired by this attempt in numerous ways, and it is also meant to modify it and to flesh it out (together with the previous chapters) into a comprehensive pluralist approach to myth. This ethical framework relies on radical democratic theory (Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, William Connolly),<sup>161</sup> the concept of dialogue of Mikhail Bakhtin,<sup>162</sup> pragmatist philosophy (John Dewey, Richard Rorty) and the historiography of Hayden White to develop an ethical approach to myths that I call “pluralist.” There have already been attempts in memory studies to develop an ethical framework based on the idea of radical democratic pluralism. Importantly, this account is certainly inspired by, but also distinct from, the idea of agonistic memory put forward by Anna Bull and Hans Hansen.<sup>163</sup> They used the ideas of radical democratic pluralism and dialogue in order to determine a new, agonistic mode of remembering that is distinct from what they called “antagonistic” and “cosmopolitan” types of memory (what I will call traditional and regretful types of myth, respectively). My intention here is not to give an account of how and what we should remember, but to determine how we should organise our mythscapes and how we should think about myths in general. What I develop is not a pluralist mode of remembering, but a pluralist mythscape within which widely different modes of remembering are encouraged to recognise each other as adversaries rather than enemies, and to fruitfully engage with each other in dialogue. I argue that it is not memory that should be agonistic, but the mythscape within which different memories can be engaged in a dialogical relationship. This is why Bull and Hansen’s remark, that

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<sup>160</sup> Bell, “Agonistic Democracy and the Politics of Memory.”

<sup>161</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso Books, 2001); William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

<sup>162</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982).

<sup>163</sup> Anna Cento Bull and Hans Lauge Hansen, “On Agonistic Memory.”

“Bell did not discuss what traits might characterize this new type of memory,”<sup>164</sup> misses the point. Similarly to me, Bell did not want to outline a “new type of memory,” but a new type of mythscape.

The chapter begins with a critique of the duty-based ethical approach to memory which is currently the dominant way of looking at the normative issues associated with the public representation of past events. In particular, I examine the core assumption of this approach that stipulates that, at least in the case of mass atrocities, a certain morally right and historically accurate reading of the past that is beyond dispute is available. Based on pragmatist arguments, I argue that historical knowledge is necessarily partial (that is, in principle and in practice incomplete and laden with value judgements), and I develop an innovative typology of myths. Depending on how the myths themselves claim to represent the past, I distinguish between myths-as-truth, myths-as-interpretation and myths-as-fiction. I then explore the pragmatist philosophical approach to the discipline of history and the radical democratic critique of liberal democratic theories. In the second part of the chapter, I use these observations to develop a pluralist ethical approach to myths. I explain the role that the state and education should play in an agonistic democracy. I demonstrate how an acknowledgement-based mythscape differs from, and is less problematic than, a recognition-based one. I emphasise the importance of critical education, which I understand to be the teaching of the tools that are necessary to evaluate different myths and the general propagation of a critical attitude to publicly represented historical narratives, and sentimental education, the “emotional manipulation” of the citizens in order to promote empathy. These educational approaches rely on the notion about the self-reflexive capacities of social agents for which I have argued in the previous chapter. Finally, I present some real world examples which are meant to support the empirical claims embedded in this ethical framework.

For the purposes of this ethical account, I differentiate between four major approaches to the source of ethics, between four ways of thinking about the basis upon which to make distinctions between good and bad. First, consequentialist or result-based ethical approaches judge the rightness of an action based on the consequences of that action. The essence of utilitarianism, probably the most well-known approach that mostly relies on consequentialist logic, is best captured by Jeremy Bentham’s famous “fundamental axiom, *it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong*.”<sup>165</sup> It posits that social action should be assessed based on the amount of utility or happiness (or some other measure of well-being) that they bring to most people in a community. Second, deontological or duty-based ethical approaches are built upon the idea that actions in themselves, irrespective of their consequences or their social contexts,

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 401.

<sup>165</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *A Fragment on Government* (Union, NJ: The Lawbook Exchange, 2001), 93. Italics in the original.

can be said to be morally right or wrong. Deontological ethics starts with positing first principles based upon which it derives a set of abstract ethical criteria and then uses it to evaluate the morality of (social or individual) actions. Immanuel Kant's concept of the categorical imperative, the moral duty (to act or not to act in a certain way) that needs to be honoured unconditionally in all circumstances, relies heavily on this logic. Third, contextualist ethical approaches aim to historicise ethical questions instead of appealing to universal moral standards. They situate social actions in the historical context in which they happen and evaluate them with reference to the ethical considerations prevalent in that particular context and to the relevant conditions of possibility. Fourth, pragmatist ethics is similarly sceptical of the belief in timeless and universal moral absolutes, and holds that subscribing to a particular normative framework (be it consequentialist, deontological or else) and acting on its ideas *as if* they were true can be compatible with thinking that these ethical approaches might not express the universal moral truth, with thinking that these ideas might be supplanted in the future if acting on them does not produce the desired results, with thinking that societies should have the means by which they can move beyond these ideas. For this reason, pragmatism hopes to complement rather than to replace other normative approaches. It argues that we should ethically differentiate between values and ideas on the basis of the practical consequences of acting on them if they were assumed to be true, not on the basis of which normative approach they originate in and the extent to which they conform to some universal moral truth.

It must be noted that these ethical approaches are not isolated from each other and actual ethical accounts in fact rely on a number of these. In practice, it makes more sense to talk about accounts that *mainly* follow a consequentialist/deontological/other logic than about purely consequentialist and purely deontological ethical frameworks. In the following, I present an ethical account of myth that primarily relies on pragmatist and contextualist ideas and is meant to complement and go beyond the deontological logic dominant in the field.

### **Duty-Based Ethics of Myth**

Duty-based ethical frameworks are currently the dominant approach with respect to the ethics of the representation of the past. Works in this vein mainly follow a deontological logic and aim to establish that there is a social and/or individual moral duty to commemorate certain parts of the past. Based on the nature of the historical events in question, we can distinguish between two types of theories. Some argue that members of a group have a moral duty to commemorate the historical events that are important for the collective (exemplified here by the “ethics of

memory” account of Avishai Margalit),<sup>166</sup> while others concentrate specifically on the moral requirement to commemorate mass atrocities that were committed by, or in the name of, a community (represented here by the “duty to remember” approaches of Linda Radzik and Nenad Dimitrijevic).<sup>167</sup>

Margalit argued that members of a group have an obligation to remember fateful events in the life of the collective because of their group membership and because these memories are constitutive of the identity of the community. Margalit made it clear that this only implied that the group needs to make sure that the remembering takes place, not that every (or any particular) group member is required to do the remembering. Modern societies usually employ a “division of mnemonic labor”<sup>168</sup> and entrust public institutions with fulfilling this mnemonic obligation.

By contrast, Radzik and Dimitrijevic based their argument on the collective responsibility tradition of Larry May<sup>169</sup> and contended that all members are morally compelled to remember in communities where human rights violations have been committed on a massive scale. Radzik based her theory on the “reasonable fear of the victims.” She reasoned that a social group which has been the target and the victim of serious violations of human rights may have good reason to fear the people in whose name the crimes have been committed. In turn, the “reasonable fear of the victims” obliges members of the society to address this problem “because fear is a morally significant harm.”<sup>170</sup> Moreover, Radzik claimed that “even non-perpetrating members of the wrongdoing group will be objects of reasonable fear, even they have duties to respond.”<sup>171</sup> Moral responsibility in this sense does not imply causal connection to the committed crimes. Using the definition developed by Manuel Velasquez, the backward-looking meaning of the term is indeed “used to indicate that an action or its consequences are attributable to a certain agent,”<sup>172</sup> but here responsibility is understood in the forward-looking sense, denoting duty or obligation, something that an agent is required to do.

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<sup>166</sup> Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*.

<sup>167</sup> Linda Radzik, “Collective Responsibility and Duties to Respond,” *Social Theory and Practice* 27, no. 3 (2001): 455–71; Linda Radzik, *Making Amends: Atonement in Morality, Law, and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Nenad Dimitrijevic, *Duty to Respond: Mass Crime, Denial, and Collective Responsibility* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011).

<sup>168</sup> Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, 52.

<sup>169</sup> Larry May, *The Morality of Groups: Collective Responsibility, Group-Based Harm, and Corporate Rights* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987); Larry May and Stacey Hoffman, eds., *Collective Responsibility: Five Decades of Debate in Theoretical and Applied Ethics* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991); Larry May, *Sharing Responsibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>170</sup> Radzik, “Collective Responsibility and Duties to Respond,” 467.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Manuel Velasquez, “Why Corporations Are Not Morally Responsible for Anything They Do,” in *Collective Responsibility. Five Decades of Debate in Theoretical and Applied Ethics* (Savage: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991), 112.

Dimitrijevic, on the other hand, built his account on group identity and personal identity. He argued that “provided certain conditions are met, *all members* of a non-voluntary group in whose name mass crime is committed ... are duty-bound to respond ... responsible ... accountable in a non-vicarious manner. The basis of their responsibility is the crime-specific relationship between group identity and personal identity.”<sup>173</sup> In outlining the conditions of his statement, he used Radzik’s notion of collective crime defined as a wrong that is “committed in the name of a group by a significant number of its members, and the victims are chosen on the basis of their belonging to a different group.”<sup>174</sup> According to this approach, each and every member belonging to the group in whose name collective crimes have been committed has a duty to respond to these crimes, and their response should adhere to three moral requirements: the recognition of moral responsibility in the backward-looking sense mentioned above and the acknowledgement of the suffering of the victims, reflection on past wrongs, and appropriate action (disassociation from the criminal actions and demonstration of the willingness to return to normalcy).

Notwithstanding their differences, the ethics of memory and the duty to remember branches of duty-based ethical theorising have a number of assumptions in common. Most importantly, they both believe that social action should be “applied ethics,” that it should be the practical application of universal moral laws derived in hypothetical scenarios. For this reason, as Olick pointed out, the duty-based discussion is often completely abstract and ahistorical, rests on an assumption of “unilinear and teleological model of social and moral development”<sup>175</sup> and refrains from cultural contextualisation in the fear that it would open the way for relativizing moral values.<sup>176</sup> Far from embracing what he called “moral relativism,” Olick essentially agreed with the values and the goals of the duty-based approach but took issue with the way it proposed to achieve these goals. True to their Kantian foundations, duty-based discussions of political regret hold that moral duties need to be honoured irrespective of historical conditions. In the spirit of the formula “ought implies can,” these approaches pay little attention to the limits of political action in particular historical contexts and to the wider social repercussions of the measures aimed at achieving the ends dictated by categorical imperatives. Based on Weber, Olick identified this logic with the ethic of conviction and thought that ethical discussions of political regret should instead follow the ethic of responsibility: become more practical and contextualised, and pay more

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<sup>173</sup> Dimitrijevic, *Duty to Respond*, 2.

<sup>174</sup> Radzik, “Collective Responsibility and Duties to Respond,” 456.

<sup>175</sup> Olick, *The Politics of Regret*, 125.

<sup>176</sup> Note that Olick criticised the strand of the duty-based moral philosophy literature concerned with political regret, which is practically equivalent to what I call the “duty to remember” strand. As the “ethics of memory” approach shares many assumptions of the latter, much of Olick’s critique is also applicable in this larger context.

attention to historical conditions of possibility. The two approaches essentially aim to achieve the same goals, but disagree sharply about the way these goals should be achieved.

Olick was right that any account dealing with the ethical questions related to the public representation of past events should pay close attention to the historical context and the conditions of possibility. What is less clear, however, is why he said that he essentially agreed with the arguments of “duty to respond” accounts with respect to the morally right social outcomes when he so convincingly challenged the very assumptions upon which those arguments were built. One of these is the attempt to separate moral considerations from politics. It all begins with language. When referring to what Olick called the “politics of regret,” the “duty to respond” framework prefers to use expressions such as “a society fulfils its duty to remember” or “a nation honours the memory of the victims.” By referring to the acts of political regret as “politics,” Olick intentionally chose to break with this apparently apolitical form of speech that implies that public apology and the assumption of responsibility for past crimes are morally desirable in all circumstances and that all the other social responses to past atrocities (for instance, denial or silence) are morally wanting and are the results of dirty political meddling. Naturally, the adoption of the term “politics of regret” did not render categories “neutral” in any sense; this conceptualisation simply conveys a different preconception, one which holds that political struggles and power games have an important part to play in all public representations of past events.

Similarly, Bell claimed that the main problem with Margalit’s ethics of memory account “stems directly from his explicit attempt to disconnect the ethics of memory from the politics of memory.”<sup>177</sup> In fact, the attempts to depoliticise social remembrance and to specify how past events should ideally be commemorated are two sides of the same coin. But aspiring for apolitical “remembering” on the social level is naive. In practice, the politics of memory and the ethics of memory “are interwoven, and they cannot—or at least should not—be separated in this manner.”<sup>178</sup> Once the arguments of moral theories are used to evaluate specific cases, are invoked in political debates or are considered to be implemented in practice, they inevitably become politics rather than a purely moral theory. The duty-based ethical approach should recognise and consciously evaluate the political dimension of its work. At the moment, however, duty-based theories of remembering are only concerned with achieving morally desirable goals derived from abstract, idealised situations and do not take into account the potential political use and the likely social implications of their assumptions and arguments. This is not simply politically naive, but

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<sup>177</sup> Bell, “Agonistic Democracy and the Politics of Memory,” 154.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.



also politically irresponsible and potentially dangerous. For instance, if a politician blindly follows an ethic of conviction with respect to memory in a delicate negotiated transitional context, he/she might significantly slow down the transitional process or might even jeopardise its negotiated, bloodless nature. Or consider an academic who is only narrowly interested in achieving the public acknowledgement of certain past atrocities. Without considering the larger political context, he/she might be inadvertently producing ammunition for political groups which the academic would otherwise never support, and these political groups appropriating his/her arguments and acting on them can easily change the political landscape of the polity in ways that the academic never intended. I would like to emphasise that my aim here is not to propose a “rule” that the opening of the archives of the secret police immediately after the political transition destabilises the democratic process, or that acknowledging past wrongs always weakens moderate parties. The outcome of these actions depends on the specificities of each situation and this is exactly why we need an ethical framework that is more sensitive to the socio-political context than duty-based accounts.

Another issue is that duty-based approaches routinely take for granted that, prior to and independent of theorisation, a community exists within which commemoration does or should take place (what I will call the “mnemonic community assumption”) and that a historical narrative exists that the members of this community do or should commemorate. There are two forms of the latter assumption: either it is posited that the memory is already important for the community (“collective memory assumption”) or it is claimed that there is an authoritative reading of the past that should become important for the community (“historical truth assumption”). Both the ethics of memory and the duty to respond accounts make the mnemonic community assumption while they often differ with respect to the nature of the historical narrative that is to be remembered; the collective memory assumption is typical of ethics of memory accounts whereas the historical truth assumption is typical of duty to respond theories.

By assuming away the existence of a cohesive community and its collective memory, ethics of memory accounts actually follow the organicist logic whose shortcomings were discussed extensively in the previous two chapters. Essentializing communities and their memories is problematic because neither of them are naturally occurring phenomena that exist “out there”; instead of being eternal and static over time, they are the fragile and ever-changing products of historical contingencies. Bell noted that Margalit’s ethics of memory, by not explaining “how understandings of the past emerge and are reproduced ... presents a static rather than a dynamic

account of politics, and this serves to naturalize the prevailing constellation of power.”<sup>179</sup> Theorising about the ethics of the representation of the past has real political effects. Therefore, the mnemonic community and the collective memory assumptions are not only highly questionable empirical claims about the social world, but also directly contradict the attempt of duty-based approaches to decouple the ethics of memory from the politics of memory.

### **The Notion of Historical Truth**

With respect to the representation of past atrocities, the duty to respond view (mostly implicitly) makes four claims: an ontological, an epistemological, an empirical and an ethical claim. The ontological claim is that an objectively true reading of the past exists “out there”; the epistemological claim is that historians can approximate this truth through the rigorous and systematic study of evidence; the empirical claim is that this historical truth can be presented to the wider public as it is or in a form that does not significantly alter its “true” nature; finally, the final ethical claim is that the historical truth should guide public representations of the past. In the following, I will only concentrate on the epistemological claim which is so fundamental that its convincing critique could bring the whole theoretical edifice into question.

The historical truth assumption is indispensable for duty to respond accounts. In order to assign responsibility for past atrocities, these approaches need to posit that an authoritative reading of the past exists, that “in all mass crimes one particular set of facts and one particular evaluative stance are beyond dispute.”<sup>180</sup> Assessing this assumption properly would require engagement with centuries (if not millennia) of historical theory. Without trying to intervene in this debate, I will rely on the works of Arthur Danto and Hayden White to criticise this assumption. For my purposes, it is sufficient to say that today very few historians still believe that it is possible to “show what really happened,” as the influential nineteenth-century historian Leopold van Ranke claimed. In fact, there is rarely perfect agreement between historians for good reasons. Even if a “set of facts” (or, I would rather say, a set of factual statements) was particularly well-supported by historical evidence, it would still not be sufficient for faithfully reconstructing the past “as it was,” for forming an authoritative reading of the past that can be the basis of commemoration.

The first part of the historical truth assumption, that a certain set of facts can be beyond dispute, is highly questionable for at least two reasons. First, events of the past cannot be fully reconstructed by historians simply because the information about them is always only partially

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>180</sup> Dimitrijevic, *Duty to Respond*, 18.

available. Following Arthur Danto,<sup>181</sup> Arash Abizadeh noted that “historical narratives are always *in practice* incomplete because ... the historical records on which they are based are incomplete.”<sup>182</sup> A historical account is also practically incomplete because students of history have neither the time to acquaint themselves with all the available evidence nor the space to convey all the available information to their audience. Second, and more importantly, any historical narrative is “essentially and so *in principle* incomplete”<sup>183</sup> because what is included in it has been filtered by the story-teller’s own (implicit or explicit) “criteria of relevance,” by his or her pre-existing “ideological baggage.” We are part of the social world that we study and there is no objective, detached observer position. Our categories of thought and mental frames render what we experience intelligible and meaningful, which means that there is no way of looking at the world without preconceptions. As every historical narrative is practically and essentially incomplete, a set of, however well-supported, factual statements is not nearly enough to arrive at the undisputed account of the past that should be remembered according to duty to remember approaches.

The second part of the assumption, that a certain “evaluative stance” is beyond dispute, is also debatable. The criteria of significance do not only filter what is included in the narrative, but also influence how this narrative is presented. The very language in which factual statements are expressed is necessarily ambiguous and value-laden, and the way they are woven together into a narrative necessarily relies on certain literary elements. As White put it, “there is a fictive element in all historical narrative.”<sup>184</sup> “Narratives do not consist only of factual statements (singular existential propositions) and arguments; they consist as well of poetic and rhetorical elements by which what would otherwise be a list of facts is transformed into a story.”<sup>185</sup> This literary element, this mode of presentation, does not directly follow from the factual statements themselves; “any given set of real events can be emplotted in a number of ways... no given set or sequence of real events is intrinsically tragic, comic, farcical, and so on, but can be constructed as such only by the imposition of the structure of a given story type on the events.”<sup>186</sup> Factual statements do not “speak for themselves,” they do not “lend” themselves to any particular “evaluative stance.” For this reason, a multiplicity of narratives about certain events can all be historically accurate but can differ widely with respect to the interpretive “spin” of their story. Again, what should actually be

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<sup>181</sup> Arthur Danto, *Narration and Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

<sup>182</sup> Arash Abizadeh, “Historical Truth, National Myths and Liberal Democracy: On the Coherence of Liberal Nationalism,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 12, no. 3 (2004): 304. Italics in the original.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid. Italics in the original.

<sup>184</sup> Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 99.

<sup>185</sup> Hayden White, “Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth,” in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution,”* ed. Saul Friedländer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 38.

<sup>186</sup> Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 44.

remembered is far from as obvious and indisputable as duty to remember accounts would have us believe.

I would add a third criticism, namely that even factual statements cannot be treated as given and self-evident. With respect to the question of facts, I slightly differ from Danto and White because their theories are mostly concerned with how objectively derived facts are subjectively selected, organised and narrated by the historian. But surely it is untenable to assume that the historian's "baggage" only plays a role in the selection, arrangement and emplotment of historical "facts" but not in the construction of these factual statements in the first place. It would thus make more sense to say that the way factual statements are expressed also heavily relies on the preconceptions of the historian. There are certainly statements about past events that have been supported by an abundance of evidence so that we can believe in them with a very high level of confidence. I would nevertheless be reluctant to call them facts because they are neither incontestable nor objective. They are theoretically contestable in the sense that every historical statement can hypothetically be brought into question by emerging new evidence. They are not objective because they are neither value-free nor unambiguous, for the simple reason that the very language used to express them is laden with values and open to multiple interpretations.

Finally, based on the anti-foundationalist philosophy of Rorty, I would go even further and argue that there is no objectively given system of criteria based on which the historical accuracy of factual statements can be assessed. The rules of evidence, which are so central to the discipline of history, have not "emerged" naturally, they have not been "found" in nature. The historical discipline's shared standards for checking the historical accuracy of factual statements—as consensual, refined and taken for granted as they might be—have been developed by historians themselves over the centuries. I agree with Keith Jenkins that, as in the case of any discipline, it was historians who created the object of their study, the associated "questions" and "problems" of history, the data that were deemed relevant for answering these questions, and the methods with which these data could be assessed and interpreted. "For the past itself does not have 'problems', only historians have those: 'historical problems' are the problems which historians themselves both 'create' and 'solve'."<sup>187</sup> This means that the discipline of history might be able to determine the extent to which a factual statement is accurate according to its own evaluative criteria, but these rules of evidence are by no means universal and absolute; it is in fact perfectly possible that the proponents of some identity-constitutive mythologies do not share these standards. This argument rests on the anti-foundationalist claim that "there are not—and nor have

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<sup>187</sup> Keith Jenkins, *On "What Is History?": From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White* (London: Routledge, 1995), 171.

there ever been—any ‘real’ foundations of the kind alleged to underpin the experiment of the modern... we live amidst social formations which have no legitimising ontological or epistemological or ethical grounds for our beliefs or actions beyond the status of an ultimately self-referencing (rhetorical) conversation.”<sup>188</sup> The discipline of history is one self-referencing conversation among many; it is a very sophisticated conversation and one whose underlying rules I personally happen to accept, but I also accept that these rules are not the only possible ones by which people could play.

To sum up, the historical truth assumption has been criticised for four reasons. It has been argued that any historical narrative is practically and essentially incomplete; that the fictive or rhetorical element is an indispensable part of any narrative; that the factual statements upon which narratives are based are also subject to the inherent ambiguity and normativity of language in which they are expressed; and that the standards according to which these factual statements are judged are not objective and universal, but are specific to that particular self-referencing conversation that we call the discipline of history. Therefore, I think it is justified to call all historical accounts *partial* in both senses of the word: they are (practically and essentially) incomplete and “biased.”

For these reasons, when we are debating narratives, we are not simply arguing over historical accuracy, that is, their conformity to evidence. I find it useful to think about debate as if it took place on (at least) two levels simultaneously: at a conceptual-ethical-methodological-epistemological level where we discuss the appropriateness of the framework of interpretation and the standards for the evaluation of historical accuracy, and at an empirical level where we argue about how well the given narrative conforms to available and credible pieces of evidence. The multiplicity of possible interpretive frameworks and evaluative standards means that there is a multiplicity of plausible narratives, each of them considered valid within its own interpretive and evaluative framework. However, it does not imply that “anything goes,” that any narrative is as good (valid, plausible) as another. To say that there is no single, absolute standard of evaluation does not mean that there are no standards of evaluation at all; it does not mean that historians do not strive to construct narratives that are “truthful” as long as we understand “truthfulness” as conformity to evidence according to the standards of the historical discipline. It certainly makes sense to talk about more and less accurate historical narratives, and about narratives that directly contradict evidence (provided that we come to share a certain set of criteria for the evaluation of accuracy). However, the above *does* mean that the narratives cannot be “truthful” in the sense that they are not glimpses or approximations of a singular Truth that exists somewhere out there; it

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 7.

does mean that aspiring for knowing the historical Truth with a capital T is no more than wishful thinking.

It is important to note that this critique of the historical truth assumption of duty-based approaches to the representation of past events does not mean the rejection of the institutions of transitional justice in general. Legal processes, such as the punishment of the perpetrators of crimes against humanity and the compensation of victims for their suffering, can still be important and justified in different historical contexts. However, it does not follow from this that the public representation of historical events should be forced to conform to these legal decisions. Demonstrating the occurrence of a criminal act “beyond reasonable doubt” is sufficient for these legal measures, but this is not near enough for an authoritative account of the past. Showing the accuracy of a certain factual statement “beyond reasonable doubt” is a long way from establishing a full-fledged historical narrative of a past event that is beyond dispute.

## **A Typology of Myths**

Based on my arguments so far, I propose a typology of myths that is inspired by Abizadeh’s classification, but it also significantly departs from it. Abizadeh made the crucial analytical distinction between “myth as imaginative narrative story and myth as a narrative purporting to make historical truth claims.”<sup>189</sup> He referred to the former, myths that do not claim to be the historical truth, as myths-as-story; these are “understood by the collectivity’s members in literary terms” and their importance lies in “the inspiration for human action, in their ethical message, or in the very act of reading a set of stories in common with others.”<sup>190</sup> On the other hand, “some identity-constituting myths are understood as a set of historical truth claims by the actors who bear the identity”; in the case of myths-as-history, “the historical narrative undergirds a collective identity only insofar as it is understood to be making truth claims.”<sup>191</sup> Within this category, Abizadeh further distinguished between myths-as-lie (historically false), myths-as-embellishment (relying on an interpretive spin) and myths-as-omission (relying on the selective representation of facts). As he acknowledged that any account of the past is practically and essentially incomplete but wanted to save the notion of historical veracity, Abizadeh needed to carefully draw a fine line between myths-as-omission and “true and appropriate” historical narratives.

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<sup>189</sup> Abizadeh, “Historical Truth, National Myths and Liberal Democracy,” 296–297.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 297–298.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 297.

Having expressed my misgivings about the notion of a true narrative earlier, I propose a different classification. If historical research at its best can only provide us with good interpretations of past events (that is, good by the standards of their own framework of interpretation), then no historical narrative can honestly claim to represent the Truth about history. If a narrative does not claim to represent the singular historical Truth, it would need to be classified as a “story” in Abizadeh’s terminology. The problem is that this would amount to a radical rejection of any boundary (however porous) between history and literature as it would group all narratives (the completely fictional along with the one relying on, admittedly partial, historical evidence) under the same heading. Even if there is no clear-cut disciplinary boundary between history and literature,<sup>192</sup> I think that it is worth differentiating between myths that strive for some degree of historical accuracy within a certain interpretive framework (myths-as-interpretation) and those that do not (myths-as-fiction). The spectrum between these two ideal typical categories constitutes the myths that do not claim to represent the historical truth (myths-as-story in Abizadeh’s understanding). On the other hand, I label the myths that do claim to be the singular historical Truth as myths-as-truth which encompass not only what are myths-as-history for Abizadeh, but also any publicly represented historical narrative that purports to be “true and appropriate.” As there are only partial accounts of the past, myths-as-truth are by definition dishonest about their mythical status. To sum up, the mythical status of a publicly represented identity-constitutive historical narrative can be threefold: myth-as-truth, myth-as-interpretation and myth-as-fiction. Naturally, this categorisation can be transposed to historical narratives that are not identity-constitutive and/or represented publicly, but these are not relevant for the problems discussed here.

### **Myths and the Discipline of History**

Given the epistemological critique of the historical truth assumption presented earlier, we need to rethink the distinction and the relationship between publicly represented identity-constitutive narratives and the historical discipline. The rigid separation of the two has a long tradition in academia where certain historians depicted their discipline as an objective, rigorous and impartial scholarly enterprise in search of the authoritative account of past events (the historical truth) that can be clearly distinguished from the subjective, emotional and socially constructed world of collective memory. This dichotomy implies that collective memory is an intellectually inferior and often socially dangerous way of looking at the past. From this point of view, history should guide memory and prevent it from being overtaken by untrue, and potentially

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<sup>192</sup> For the debate about the relationship between the two disciplines, see Kuisma Korhonen, ed., *Tropes for the Past: Hayden White and the History/Literature Debate* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006).

dangerous, stories. As Tony Judt and Timothy Snyder expressed, “[w]ithout history, memory is open to abuse. But if history comes first, then memory has a template and a guide against which it can work and be assessed.”<sup>193</sup> Similarly, in his defence of the notion of historical facts, Timothy Garton Ash identified “the memory hole” with “falsification, airbrushing, rewriting history.”<sup>194</sup> The past is required to be publicly represented with scrupulous historical accuracy because, as Nora claimed, “memory divides and history alone unites. Historians are the best situated ... to say to all ... what the past authorizes and what it does not permit.”<sup>195</sup>

The separation of history and memory in this manner has been challenged in different ways. Some thinkers denied the possibility of historical truth and blurred the line between history and memory completely. Peter Burke understood history as a kind of social memory but upheld its contribution to understanding the past. He embraced a certain historical relativism which did not mean that “any account of the past is just as good (reliable, plausible, perceptive...) as any other... The point is that we have access to the past (like the present) only via the categories and schemata ... of our own culture.”<sup>196</sup> The Popular Memory Group also blurred the line between history and memory by claiming that “history has a particular place in a much larger process ... ‘the social production of memory.’ In this collective production everyone participates, though unequally. Everyone, in this sense, is a historian.”<sup>197</sup>

Others took an intermediate position which recognised history and the public representation of the past as two distinct but necessarily interconnected and overlapping domains. Assmann agreed with the ontological-epistemological claim that the discipline of history, in its search of truth, is an intellectually superior way to knowledge, but was sceptical about whether it can or should guide public representations of the past. “History turns into myth as soon as it is remembered, narrated, used, that is, woven into the fabric of the present.”<sup>198</sup> This does not undermine history as an academic undertaking because the “mythical qualities of history have nothing to do with its truth values,”<sup>199</sup> but it does mean that the work of historians, their ever closer approximation of historical truth, cannot be represented in the public sphere in a direct and undistorted way. Therefore, Assmann upheld the possibility of knowing (or at least approximating)

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<sup>193</sup> Tony Judt and Timothy Snyder, *Thinking the Twentieth Century* (New York: William Heinemann, 2012), 278.

<sup>194</sup> Timothy Garton Ash, *Facts Are Subversive: Political Writing from a Decade without a Name* (London: Atlantic Books, 2009), 348.

<sup>195</sup> Quoted in Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 269.

<sup>196</sup> Burke, “History as Social Memory,” 99.

<sup>197</sup> Popular Memory Group, “Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method,” in *Making Histories: Studies in History-Writing and Politics*, ed. Richard Johnson (London: Hutchinson, 1982), 207.

<sup>198</sup> Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 14.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*



the historical truth (what I called the epistemological claim of the historical truth assumption), but he did not agree with the empirical claim that this authoritative reading can be publicly presented as it is (or at least without significant changes).

Even if one accepts the claim that all of our historical narratives are necessarily partial, I agree with Bell that history and myth can be considered distinct in at least two ways. Firstly, academic history is too complicated and too detailed to be suitable for mass consumption in its original, unabridged and undistorted form. “At least when pursued systematically, history is too meticulous, too intricate and too complex to be assimilated easily into national mythology,” or indeed into any kind of identity-constitutive representation of past events, as these are “based on generalization and deliberate simplification and packaged into easily comprehended and reproducible narratives.”<sup>200</sup> Secondly, contrary to the air of certainty projected by most mythologies, historical scholarship at its best exercises a high degree of self-reflexivity and constantly reminds itself and its audience of the uncertainty and the fallibility of the knowledge that it produces. To say that there are multiple possible ways of representing the past does not mean that no distinctions can be made between different narratives. As Barthes argued, some representations are less mystifying than others in that “they overtly call attention to their own processes of production, clearly flag their own assumptions, and indicate explicitly and repeatedly the constituted rather than the found nature of their referent, ‘the historicised past’.”<sup>201</sup> Critical history openly go against the long-standing assumption that “[o]ne of the basic purposes of historiography is to legitimize authority.”<sup>202</sup>

Critical historians are—or at least should be—selfreflexive, aware of the partiality, weak foundations, and fallibility of their enterprise, as opposed to the intrinsic simplicity and univocality of mythology. While always aware of the dangers of nationalist glorification and accommodation, this mode of historical sensibility stresses the contingency, opacity, and plurality of the past. It can be counterposed to “mythistory,” the form of history writing that seeks meaning in the ebb and flow of time, searching for glory, heroism, and ultimately transcendence.<sup>203</sup>

By this point, many readers are surely wondering about how the Holocaust fits into this pragmatist picture. If the foundations of knowledge are questioned to such a degree, how can we still respond to fascists and Holocaust deniers? This is certainly a valid concern. Indeed, the Holocaust has been routinely invoked as “the limit case of historiographical theory,”<sup>204</sup> as the

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<sup>200</sup> Bell, “Mythsapes,” 77.

<sup>201</sup> Roland Barthes, “Le Discours de L’histoire,” *Information Sur Les Sciences Sociales* 6, no. 4 (1967): 63–75; Jenkins, *On ‘What Is History?’*, 9.

<sup>202</sup> Bernard Lewis, *History: Remembered, Recovered, Invented* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 18.

<sup>203</sup> Bell, “Agonistic Democracy and the Politics of Memory,” 153.

<sup>204</sup> Michael Dintenfass, “Truth’s Other: Ethics, the History of the Holocaust, and Historiographical Theory after the Linguistic Turn,” *History and Theory* 39, no. 1 (2000): 1.

ultimate and most difficult test of epistemologically “relativist” accounts of historical knowledge. Dewey and Rorty have both been repeatedly asked how their “fuzzy” philosophy can provide good reasons not to be fascists, and the usual complaint against the historiography of White is that it cannot satisfactorily counter Holocaust deniers. To this challenge, White responded that it can be shown that Holocaust deniers are wrong simply because they fail to follow basic rules of evidence.<sup>205</sup> Unless they openly disavow these standards of historical research, which even Holocaust deniers rarely do, the rules of evidence can be applied to assess the validity of their statements. Where White departs from more traditional historians is in realising that just because a framework of interpretation is ethically inappropriate does not automatically imply that narratives within that framework are necessarily historically inaccurate. White outlined two such historically accurate narratives of the Holocaust with ethically dubious frameworks of interpretation. One is a neo-Nazi version which recognises the genocide of the Jews but praises it as a rightful and heroic act that was necessary for the survival of the German race. The other is a Zionist narrative in which the brutality of the mass murder is dissolved in a grand narrative about the suffering and the martyrdom of the Jewish people. White found the interpretive framework of both narratives ethically wanting (without trying to imply that the two are equally bad), but he thought that they can nevertheless be historically accurate within those frameworks. Kansteiner added that many of the representations of the Holocaust in popular culture also fit this description. “By celebrating Holocaust survivors, rescuers, and liberators, the vast genre of popular films and documentaries about the ‘Final Solution’ thrive on the challenge of casting the seemingly gloomy topic of Nazi genocide into optimistic, uplifting narratives of great entertainment and monetary value.”<sup>206</sup> Probably the worst offender in this respect is *Schindler’s List*. The film strives to be as authentic as possible, but its interpretive framework renders it what I consider, following Imre Kertész, the finest example of the kitsch representations of the Holocaust.

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<sup>205</sup> White, *The Content of the Form*, 76–80.

<sup>206</sup> Wulf Kansteiner, “Success, Truth, and Modernism in Holocaust Historiography: Reading Saul Friedländer Thirty-Five Years After the Publication of *Metahistory*,” *History and Theory* 48, no. 2 (2009): 30.

But I also regard as kitsch any representation of the Holocaust that fails to imply the wide-ranging ethical consequences of Auschwitz, and from which the PERSON in capital letters (and with it the idea of the Human as such) emerges from the camps healthy and unharmed... I regard as kitsch any representation of the Holocaust that is incapable of understanding or unwilling to understand the organic connection between our own deformed mode of life (whether in the private sphere or on the level of “civilization” as such) and the very possibility of the Holocaust.<sup>207</sup>

When it comes to how pragmatic philosophy can respond to the ethically inappropriate frameworks, Rorty argued that the “frequent complaint that a philosopher who holds the pragmatic theory of truth cannot give you a reason not to be a fascist is perfectly justified. But neither can that person give you a reason to be a fascist.”<sup>208</sup> Rorty nevertheless rejected the charge of relativism which “is the view that every belief on a certain topic, or perhaps about any topic, is as good as every other. No one holds this view... So the real issue is not between people who think one view as good as another and people who do not. It is between those who think our culture, or purpose, or intuitions cannot be supported except conversationally, and people who still hope for other sorts of support.”<sup>209</sup>

Pragmatists are routinely accused of irresponsibly deconstructing the thin layer that keeps us from falling into the abyss of nihilism. But Rorty argued that these critics are “tricked by Plato” into believing that the role of philosophy is to concentrate on convincing “the rather rare figure of the psychopath”—such as Thrasymachus, Callicles and Hitler—and into believing that unless our knowledge has “real” foundations, we cannot convincingly respond to them. However, just because we pragmatists do not believe in the Platonic assumption that there are common grounds to which these “rational egotists” “must assent simply by virtue of being rational, language-using animals” does not mean that we have nothing to say to them and that we believe that their belief in their rational egotism is just as good as our belief in our universal humanity.<sup>210</sup>

We are said to leave the general public defenseless against the witch doctor, the defender of creationism, or anyone else... What we in fact infer is that there is no way to beat totalitarians in argument by appealing to shared common premises, and no point in pretending that a common human nature makes the totalitarians unconsciously hold such premises.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Imre Kertész, “Who Owns Auschwitz?,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14, no. 1 (2001): 270.

<sup>208</sup> Richard Rorty, “Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism,” in *The Revival of Pragmatism: New Essays on Social Thought, Law, and Culture*, ed. Morris Dickstein (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 25.

<sup>209</sup> Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism (Essays: 1972-1980)* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 166–67.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 123; Rorty, “Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism,” 27.

<sup>211</sup> Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 42.

In fact, the belief in the absolute truth and in the objective way of determining it is rather convenient for the totalitarian projects as well.

Anti-pragmatists fool themselves when they think that by insisting, and claiming to demonstrate, that moral truths are “objective”—are true independent of human needs, interests, history—they have provided us with weapons against the bad guys. For the fascists can, and often do, reply that they entirely agree that moral truth is objective, eternal and universal [and it also happens to be fascist]... Dewey made much of the fact that traditional notions of “objectivity” and “universality” were useful to the bad guys, and he had a point.<sup>212</sup>

Rorty thus turned the tables on anti-pragmatists by arguing that their emphasis on objective and universal truth can easily be part of the problem rather than the solution, that in fact it is the notion of ultimate truth that makes us vulnerable to fascists, not the rejection of this belief. In the wrong hands, this supposed “superweapon” of philosophy can easily be the greatest threat to the idea of tolerance rather than its protector.

To sum up, Rorty thought that the notion of ultimate truth is an ineffective weapon against extremists at best and a highly counterproductive one at worst. It is ineffective because it wrongly assumes that fascists and the like (consciously or unconsciously) share certain basic premises with us just because they are humans (and are thus endowed with the universal capacity of reason), and that we could convince them of our ultimate truth if only we made them realise in a rational debate that they hold these basic premises. Moreover, the weapon of objective truth can easily turn in our hands and be highly dangerous as these rational egotists might also find it useful to follow this logic and to ground their arguments by appealing to (a different) unquestionable truth. There might be good philosophical arguments for not believing in the notion of ultimate knowledge, but pragmatists like Rorty are more dissuaded from it because of the potentially harmful practical consequences of holding such a view.

For these reasons, Rorty proposed a typically pragmatist solution. He thought that, at least since Plato, most philosophers have been searching (in vain) for firm groundings for their knowledge so that they can effectively respond to the challenge posed by the fictional rational egotist. Instead of fighting these futile battles and developing such double-edge weapons in the process, we should realise that philosophical arguments, and especially those that rely on views about ultimate knowledge, might not be the right weapons against such madmen.<sup>213</sup> Rorty argued that the adequate response to this problem should have a less rationalistic and more conversational style, such as sentimental education, about which I will talk in detail later in this chapter.

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<sup>212</sup> Richard Rorty, “Just One More Species Doing Its Best,” *London Review of Books* 13, no. 14 (1991): 6.

<sup>213</sup> Rorty, “Just One More Species Doing Its Best.”

What all this means for the discipline of history is that its practitioners would do well to acknowledge that historical accounts are constructed, not found; that they are practically and essentially incomplete; that they necessarily contain a fictive element; that the factual statements underpinning these readings of the past are fallible, ambiguous, and laden with values; and that the rules of evidence are the *chosen* standards for the evaluation of historical research, not naturally *given*. This acknowledgement does not change the way historians do research, the standards for the evaluation of their work or the validity of existing historical accounts. As such, it does not make the discipline vulnerable to “anything goes” and Holocaust deniers whose claims will still be considered false by the standards of the discipline. In fact, there is strength in admitting the contingency of “philosophical bets” and the uncertainty of knowledge, and in realising that appealing to the notion of objective truth may not be the best strategy. It might not be the best strategy not just because there are some good philosophical arguments against it, but also because it is unlikely to convince the “anything goes” and Holocaust deniers who may also use this notion to their advantage. In the resultant dead end of perpetual antagonism, each side appeals to some absolute truth and fundamentally rejects the possibility of holding the view of the other. In the following, I will explain a social approach to myths that is built on this realisation; it outlines a potentially better strategy of dealing with extreme and intolerant views and specifically aims to overcome this lasting animosity.

### **Dialogue in a Radical Democracy**

In the previous section, I criticised duty-based ethical accounts for relying on untenable assumptions about historical truth and social cohesion. Although the pragmatist approach to historical and moral truth explained in the previous sections does have some practical repercussions for how the state and its citizens should treat different sorts of publicly projected narratives, it is in itself insufficient to provide a comprehensive ethical theory of myths. I will thus draw on radical democratic theory to provide inspiration for a pluralist ethics of myths. In this section, I briefly compare two strands of liberal democratic theory (LDT) and two strands of radical democratic theory (RDT) and argue for a pluralist conception that is compatible with the pragmatist ideas outlined above. Based on these two traditions, in the following sections I will explain the role of the state, of education and of citizens with respect to myths in a pluralist radical democratic setting.

Different strands of liberal democratic theory imply different approaches to myths. Following Alan Finlayson, I distinguish between two broad categories of liberal democratic theory:

aggregationist and accommodationist.<sup>214</sup> Both types of theory assume that politics should be based on the rational consent of sovereign individuals on whom the state should not impose a certain conception of the “good life,” but they differ with respect to how this should be achieved. Having faith in individual autonomy and rationality, aggregationist approaches hold that individuals can and should define their preferences, their own conception of the “good life,” and make rational decisions to satisfy these interests. These choices are therefore constitutive of their personality, and interfering with them in any way violates the basic humanity of these individuals (hence the claim to inviolable human rights). As a consequence of this, the ideal state in this strand of liberal democratic theory is a minimal one that guarantees basic rights and aggregates individual preferences without influencing them or adjudicating between them. The most just and efficient outcome thus arises as a sum of countless individual choices; the role of the state is to facilitate the aggregation of these decisions, but it remains neutral with respect to these choices and to the end result of their aggregation. This strong emphasis on state neutrality means that the four state actions with respect to myths (which are, as it will be explained later, projection, support, challenge and censorship) are generally not consistent with aggregationist accounts. According to this approach, it is not the role of the state to tell individuals what they should think or should not think, either directly or indirectly. Individuals are assumed to have the capacity and the exclusive right to determine their preferences towards myths; these choices are translated into publicly projected historical narratives through the media which operates completely free from the influence of the state and aggregates these individual preferences in accordance with the laws of the market.

In contrast, accommodationist theories of liberal democracy disagree with the aggregationist model on the grounds that it is not liberal enough. Accommodationists also value individual choice and state neutrality, but they believe that the aggregationist vision of a completely passive state cannot effectively guarantee these normative commitments. Aggregationists believe that the state is neutral as long as it does not interfere with individual choices and with the process of their aggregation. The problem with this conception is that this method of guaranteeing individual autonomy and state neutrality effectively privileges certain ways of life over others and is thus self-defeating. The state’s pre-political commitment to withdraw from the process of the formation and aggregation of individual preferences does have real world implications, and it does not affect all individual normative commitments in the same way. Far from being normatively neutral, this state policy effectively prioritises a certain conception of the “good life” (the life of

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<sup>214</sup> Alan Finlayson, “Rhetoric and Radical Democratic Political Theory,” in *The Politics of Radical Democracy*, ed. Adrian Little and Moya Lloyd (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 13–32.

individual rational choice) and legitimates a process of aggregating interests that is in practice far more advantageous to those whose preferences are already dominant in a society than to those in the minority. Accommodationists argue that given these pre-political ethical choices deeply embedded in the vision of the minimal state, such a state cannot properly be neutral and thus cannot properly be consented to by all citizens. Therefore, they argue for a more interventionist state that takes positive measures to ensure neutrality, that strives to “ensure that varied communities may flourish, and that fairness and justice are accorded to all the pre-political perspectives of the various communities within a polity” by actively seeking to “help establish and maintain an accommodation between them.”<sup>215</sup> For instance, such a state can recognise multiple languages as official ones in order to ensure equal opportunities for linguistic minorities, or it can adapt legislation so as not to disproportionately affect certain religious groups (Finlayson mentions the exemptions from animal welfare laws granted to the producers of halal and kosher meat). Consequently, the accommodationist state actively intervenes in the mythscape in order to ensure that subaltern myths are given due attention. Given its ambition to remain neutral, it refrains from the outright projection and censorship of historical narratives, but it would use more indirect methods, such as support and challenge, to guarantee a fair representation of all elements of the mythscape.

At the extreme, accommodationism argues that not only the state should be neutral towards ways of life, but it should also actively promote neutrality and tolerance as an ethical principle in wider society. This radical liberal vision is even more interventionist in the sense that it does not only aim to accommodate various individual preferences, but also to modify these preferences so as to accommodate them. Radical liberalism does not shy away from directly projecting myths that promote tolerance or from censoring myths that are blatantly intolerant. For radical liberals, the principle of state neutrality, which was originally understood to be the equal treatment of all citizens and conceptions of good life, has thus morphed into a vision of a state that actively pushes for neutrality and tolerance, even if this means attempting to change the beliefs and the conceptions of the good life held by citizens.

“The paradox of such radical liberalism is very real... attempting simultaneously to advance the claim that the state must be neutral with regard to the best form of life, and a substantive notion (in the form of a commitment to tolerance and equality) of what that best form of life might in fact be—all the while advocating the deployment of state power to bring it about. Into this paradox have marched the forces of political reaction, where they have happily camped at great political profit to themselves.”<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 17.

The political right thrives on this paradox, agitating against such intrusive “social engineering” and “the tyranny of political correctness.” Even if it is obvious that these sound bites are nothing more than accusations levelled against straw men, the underlying problem of accommodationist accounts is real, and in any case neither of the two strands of liberal democratic thought is very tempting. With respect to identity-constitutive narratives, one of them would imply a free-for-all mythscape where the market, based on the needs of memory consumers and free from state intervention, determines which stories should be publicly represented and how. This “equal treatment for all” attitude effectively guarantees that some identity groups are ignored by the invisible hand and feel left out; these groups are usually already marginalised for one or more reasons, such as linguistic differences, socioeconomic status, religion and/or social prejudices. This means that aggregationist accounts imply a state that aims not to arbitrate between different conceptions of the past but paradoxically legitimates a process of aggregating individual preferences for historical narratives that is claimed to be value-free and in the interest of all, but in practice serves only the interests of some as it privileges the public representation of certain myths over others. The accommodationist strand of liberal democratic thought similarly envisages the protection of individual freedom of choice for particular readings of the past in a neutral state, but thinks that it is best served by the state actively managing the mythscape; in order to accommodate social differences, the nominally neutral state can justifiably preach tolerance as an ethical ideal, project and support narratives that have a tolerant message, challenge and even censor intolerant myths. This “equal respect for all” attitude thus leads to an irreconcilable tension between the ideal that the state should not prescribe any “good” way of life and the belief that it should try to make its citizens “better” (that is, more in accordance with its own ethical presumptions). Ultimately, both strands of liberal democratic thought “claim that the other has usurped sovereignty and sought to make the state into a vehicle for its own ideologically motivated project. And both sides are correct.”<sup>217</sup>

It has long been the ambition of radical democratic theory to offer possible ways out of this stalemate. Radical democratic thought is highly fragmented, and many thinkers would not define themselves as radical democrats even though their works could be justifiably considered under this heading. I follow Aletta Norval in considering the common features of radical democratic theories to be a critical attitude to the liberal democratic tradition (mostly on the grounds that liberal democracy is not democratic enough), a commitment to certain key ideas of liberal thought (notably freedom and equality) and to the ambition to further democratise

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 19.



liberalism (for instance, by extending and intensifying popular participation in democratic politics and by responding to the inequalities of power that can endanger the pursuit of liberal ideals). Radical democrats can thus be understood to aim to “deconstruct rather than reject the liberal tradition,”<sup>218</sup> but few of its contributors would go as far as subscribing to a notion of “radical liberal democracy” proclaimed in the more recent writings of Chantal Mouffe.<sup>219</sup>

Broadly speaking, we can distinguish between two strands within radical democratic theory: the critical theory strand and the post-structuralist strand. The critical theory strand is mainly based on the theoretical foundations of the Frankfurt School, and Jürgen Habermas’s work on public reason and deliberative democracy could be considered its most influential theory. The strand of radical democratic theory mainly inspired by the French post-structuralist tradition is most often associated with the theory of Laclau and Mouffe. Both of these branches of RDT could be understood to be Post-Marxist attempts to respond to the inadequacies of LDT. Post-Marxism is often used as a pejorative title for those “betraying” the orthodox Marxist cause, but in this sense it stands for approaches that draw on Marxist thought (especially on its emancipatory ambition), but are also critical of some of its basic assumptions (such as the base-superstructure distinction); and aim to present a balanced critique of LDT, recognising both its merits and shortcomings (as opposed to orthodox Marxism which has turned into a complete rejection of liberalism).

These two strands of RDT agree that democratic politics should not be understood as a simple aggregation of interests that stem from pre-existing identities, but as the site where these very identities are formed and transformed, expressed and contested. Thinking about the social world in terms of constantly changing and internally fragmented identities, they reject assumptions about the individual or the community as homogenous and unitary, and instead emphasise the inevitability of social difference and contestation. What the two great branches of RDT markedly disagree about is how these inevitable social differences are to be dealt with. Critical theory radical democrats believe that social differences can and should be overcome by rational consensus. In the Habermasian deliberative democratic thinking, communication is “oriented to achieving, sustaining and reviewing consensus.”<sup>220</sup> What is assumed to lead to the resolution of differences is deliberation according to normatively grounded procedures. This happens in an idealised speech situation where fully rational and equal citizens engage in argumentative speech, in a public sphere

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<sup>218</sup> Paul Barry Clarke, Joe Foweraker, and Aletta Norval, eds., “Radical Democracy,” in *Encyclopedia of Democratic Thought* (London: Routledge, 2001), 726.

<sup>219</sup> Chantal Mouffe, “Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy,” in *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship and the State*, ed. David Trend (New York: Routledge, 1996), 20.

<sup>220</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action Vol. 1: Reason and the Rationalisation of Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 17.

where differences in power and material interests are irrelevant and the best argument wins. Post-structuralist radical democrats, on the other hand, do not regard social difference as an undesirable empirical fact that needs to be dealt with or simply as an ontological condition from which we cannot escape, but critically uphold dissensus as vital for democratic politics, as the means by which democracy can be extended and intensified. They argue for an ethical commitment to social difference which should not be accommodated, dissolved or resolved, but embraced. For post-structuralist radical democrats, the result of the democratic revolution is that “the locus of power becomes *an empty place* [that] cannot be occupied,”<sup>221</sup> and democratic politics is the never-ending political struggle to occupy this place of power. This attempt is ultimately futile, because the void left by the democratic revolution is essentially impossible to fill, but this is exactly the paradox that motivates and constantly revitalises democratic politics. Finally, contrary to the emphasis on reason and rational debate of the critical theory branch of RDT, the post-structuralist branch stresses the importance of power and emotions in politics.

In the following, I will outline a post-structuralist radical democratic position based on the works of Laclau, Mouffe, and Connolly, and will combine it with Bakhtin’s conception of dialogue, which will form the theoretical basis of the pluralist ethics of myth. As mentioned before, an important starting point for radical democratic theories is the problem posed by the heterogeneity of views and identities in a society. Laclau and Mouffe take the plurality of perspectives to be a fact of social life but think that social difference and conflict do not have to be of antagonistic nature. Antagonism, the situation in which participants see each other as enemies to be eliminated, can be transformed into agonism, where participants regard each other as adversaries with whom they need to engage with. This way, contrary to the deliberative democratic view, social difference is not dissolved, but its nature is changed.

The adversary is in a certain sense an enemy, but a legitimate enemy with whom there exists a common ground. Adversaries fight against each other, but they do not put into question the legitimacy of their respective positions... Conceived in such a way, liberal-democratic politics can be seen as a consistent and never fully achieved enterprise to diffuse the antagonistic potential present in human relations. By creating the conditions for possible conflicts to take the form of confrontations among adversaries (agonism), it attempts to avoid a frontal struggle between enemies (antagonism).<sup>222</sup>

The task, according to Laclau and Mouffe, is to try to transform the nature of social conflict from antagonism to agonism, to change the relationships between social agents so that they become adversaries rather than enemies. Some theorists suggested that the way to achieve

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<sup>221</sup> Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 17.

<sup>222</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (London: Verso, 1999), 4.

this (necessarily “never fully achieved”) transformation is an open-ended dialogue between participants. As opposed to the consensus-oriented Habermasian process of deliberation, Bakhtinian dialogue does not have a teleological, fixed end point. The dialogue “is imbued with social and cultural differences and contradictions.” Far from being fully rational, the subjects of the dialogical framework are passionate and emotional, “situated in a concrete context of time and space, characterized by the co-existence of opposed and contradictory social forces and ideological dispositions.”<sup>223</sup>

It is important to note that this conception of agonistic dialogue is much more sophisticated than a simple agreement to disagree. It does presuppose an agreement that allows for the possibility of unresolved conflict (that is, for the possibility of disagreement), but it goes a lot further than this. Radical tolerance “is not a form of tolerance that simply allows us to ‘put up with’ the existence of a multiplicity of forms of life and world-views. Rather it aims at mutual recognition and co-understanding in a manner that opens up each such form of life to a diversity of reciprocal influences and points of view.”<sup>224</sup>

This mutual understanding does not mean consensus and the dissolution of conflicts, but it does not preclude their possibility either. If the participants mutually understand each other’s position, they gain access to something new and different which ideally leads to enrichment for all participants. As a result, they might or might not change their initial views and the direction of this change might or might not converge; what is important is that although some form of limited consensus is possible, it is by no means a necessary condition for mutually advantageous dialogue and for the transformation of the nature of conflicts from antagonism to agonism.

There are several reasons why it makes sense to take difference rather than consensus as the enduring condition of democratic politics. First, as Sewell argued, cultures are only ever loosely coherent with multiple social structures. Second, identities are never fixed and stable, but are fluid and malleable, constantly reformulated in the light of new social developments. As Stuart Hall noted, in the process of identification, “[t]here is always ‘too much’ or ‘too little’—an over-determination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality.”<sup>225</sup> Third, neither the democratic community (*demos*), nor its values, nor the interpretation of its values are fixed. Democracy is often assumed to be a particular form of government, a particular set of institutions, a particular way of legitimating the state, and to be constituted by a well-defined community of citizens with shared

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<sup>223</sup> Bull and Hansen, “On Agonistic Memory.”

<sup>224</sup> Michael Gardiner and Michael Mayerfeld Bell, “Bakhtin and the Human Sciences: A Brief Introduction,” in *Bakhtin and the Human Sciences: No Last Words*, ed. Michael Gardiner and Michael Mayerfeld Bell (London: SAGE, 1998), 6.

<sup>225</sup> Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs ‘Identity?’,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: SAGE, 2003), 3.

democratic values. In contrast, RDT takes democracy to be a particular way of practising politics. It rejects the assumption about a pre-existing “people” with pre-existing liberal values whose interpretation is pre-determined, and holds that it is through democratic contestation itself that the *demos* is constituted and constantly reconstituted, its values renegotiated and the content of its values reinterpreted. This goes beyond the traditional narrative that sees liberalism as a continuous extension of liberal values to ever increasing circles of human (and even non-human) beings; the proponents of RDT regard the theory as a way to democratise liberalism by “expanding the democratic possibilities for the key terms of liberalism, rendering them more inclusive, dynamic and more concrete.”<sup>226</sup> This means that even if there was a relatively well-defined community whose members agreed to honour the core liberal values of equality of liberty, the necessarily multiple and conflicting ways that these values can be interpreted implies that they can never be fully realised.<sup>227</sup> Democracy, therefore, is a truly elusive, never completely fulfilled condition, or as Jacques Derrida put it, democracy is always something “to come” (*démocratie à venir*).

Treating democracy as an elusive condition that is constituted and kept alive by disagreement and continuous political contestation, radical democrats of the poststructuralist tradition do not simply agree that pluralism is an inevitable fact of social life. They also share a normative commitment to pluralism, although they differ with respect to the form of this commitment. For instance, while Mouffe applauded pluralism unconditionally, Connolly adopted a more cautious approach.<sup>228</sup> He distinguished between pluralism and pluralisation, the acknowledgement of the fact of already existing differences and the drive towards new ones. For Connolly, the appreciation of pluralism needs to be complemented by a critical responsiveness towards pluralisation, and democracy consists in mediating the tension between the two.<sup>229</sup> This distinction will be important later for my pluralist ethics of myth in discussing the responsibility of the state with respect to historical narratives.

The pluralist (poststructuralist) version of radical democratic theory and the notion of dialogue are central to my ethics of myth which can be called radically pluralist or simply pluralist because of this influence. “Dialogue, besides being the necessary condition of comprehension, is also an ethical ideal.”<sup>230</sup> It is something to aspire to, not something that naturally is. Consequently,

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<sup>226</sup> Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000), 13.

<sup>227</sup> Adrian Little and Moya Lloyd, “Introduction,” in *The Politics of Radical Democracy*, ed. Adrian Little and Moya Lloyd (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 6.

<sup>228</sup> Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*.

<sup>229</sup> Little and Lloyd, “Introduction,” 7.

<sup>230</sup> Leszek Koczanowicz, “Beyond Dialogue and Antagonism: A Bakhtinian Perspective on the Controversy in Political Theory,” *Theory and Society* 40, no. 5 (2011): 563.

its effectiveness in overcoming antagonism depends largely on how it is “done.” In the following chapters, I will explain why a pluralist approach and dialogue are crucial for my ethical framework of myths, how the state, the education system and individual citizens should approach myths in a pluralist framework, and how they can contribute to improving dialogue about them.

### **Pluralist Ethics of Myth**

Contrary to duty-based approaches, theorisation for a pluralist ethics of myth does not start with an abstract situation in order to determine how the past should ideally be remembered, to determine how consensus and order could be achieved in place of disorder. The objective of this section is to determine how to “work the trap that one is inevitably in,”<sup>231</sup> how to most effectively deal with the “suboptimal” situation<sup>232</sup> in which we are inevitably trapped, in a social world characterised by disorder, difference and the lack of consensus.

The starting point is therefore that what is happening on the ground in most European societies (and even on the transnational level) is that multiple and conflicting representations of the past compete with each other for dominance, and most of them employ a highly exclusionary rhetoric by making mutually incompatible claims to represent the singular historical Truth. And it is because of this situation that the idea of pluralist democracy and the pragmatic conception of truth discussed so far in this chapter are so relevant for our discussion of myths. If we take Rorty’s “liberal ironist” position that believes that “progress does not mean getting closer to the Truth, but getting closer to each other,” we realise that the biggest problem with this situation is not the lack of consensus, but the lack of mutual respect and understanding; the biggest problem here is not the truthfulness or falsity of any of the prevailing narratives, but the all too often antagonistic relationships between these narratives. This is not to say that concerns about historical accuracy and consensus-building attempts to reconcile conflicting narratives have no value. These activities can be worthwhile, but they are of secondary ethical importance next to the problem of mutually exclusionary thinking. In fact, if the evaluation of the historical accuracy of myths and the initiatives to reconcile them are founded upon the notions of absolute moral and historical truth (as they often are), then they can very well exacerbate antagonism and thus be part of the problem rather than the solution. The pragmatist critique of these notions says that our main worry should not be whether our publicly represented historical narratives conform to some abstract notion of truth that can be known by the universal capacity of reason (which has been shown above to be in practice and in principle impossible anyway), but whether we as human beings treat each other

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<sup>231</sup> Judith Butler, “The Body You Want: Liz Kotz Interviews Judith Butler,” *Artforum* 31, no. 3 (1992): 84.

<sup>232</sup> More precisely, suboptimal from the point of view of ideal theory.

with the respect and empathy that we deserve. This ambition is compatible with the pluralist radical democratic belief that, given that social conflict is inevitable, at least we need to aim for considering each other as worthy opponents, not as despicable enemies. The pluralist ethics of myth thus embraces the plurality of historical narratives, challenges exclusionary notions such as absolute moral and historical truth, and promotes dialogue between participants as a way to overcome antagonistic relationships and to further mutually enriching understanding between them.

In Europe, there are two main ways very different myths struggle for dominance in an antagonistic way. On the one hand, the “three dignified roles for the national collective to assume”<sup>233</sup> in the face of fateful events of the past—glory, heroism and victimhood—are being challenged by what Olick called the politics of regret. On the other hand, as will be explained later, the victimhood narratives energised by the rise of the politics of regret compete with each other. Strangely, some victimhood narratives are both challenged by the politics of regret and energised by it at the same time. The European memory wars, which will be extensively discussed in the next part of the dissertation, are the finest example of this apparent paradox.

Olick suggested that, after the decline of the nation state, the recent wave of state apologies for crimes that they have committed in the past heralds the arrival of a new form of self-legitimation, the politics of regret, which relies on the feeling of guilt, the demand for regret, and the exposition of shameful events instead of the glorification of the national past. Based on the theoretical justification provided by the duty-based accounts explained above and on the practical example of the German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (“dealing with the past” or “coming to terms with the past”), the politics of regret has been propagated by its adherents as an ethically superior way of relating to the past; as a more advanced and more mature way of looking at the past than the traditional myths of glory, heroism and victimhood; as a type of memory that can be the foundation of post-conventional identities that are more progressive and more enlightened than national ones.

As I have already argued extensively elsewhere, the politics of regret should be seen as an identity-constitutive myth like any other and as such it should be approached as critically as any other myth.<sup>234</sup> The reason for this is that, similarly to traditional myths, the politics of regret has the tendency to present itself as a myth-as-truth, as the narrative endowed with the single morally right code and the single historically right reading of the past. The politics of regret may be replacing stories of national glory as the basis of legitimacy, but it all too often follows the very

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<sup>233</sup> Aleida Assmann, “From Collective Violence to a Common Future: Four Models for Dealing with a Traumatic Past,” in *Conflict, Memory Transfers and the Reshaping of Europe*, ed. Adriana Alves de Paula Martins et al. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 17.

<sup>234</sup> Mano Toth, “The Myth of the Politics of Regret,” *Millennium – Journal of International Studies* 43, no. 2 (2015): 551–66.

same discriminatory logic. This implies that most real world examples of political regret should not be considered as coping strategies superior to others just because the tone of their narratives is regretful. They are often just more myths-as-truth with ethically inappropriate exclusionary traits. The fact that their tone is regretful and self-flagellatory as opposed to the boastful and self-congratulatory myths of glory is of only secondary ethical significance; what I take to be much more important is the extent to which they contribute to the reproduction of antagonistic relationships by claiming to represent the truth, by claiming exclusive right to represent certain parts of the past.

At the heart of most traditional and regretful myths are the same assumptions about moral and historical truth. Far from providing clarity and authority to the struggle between myths, these assumptions fuel the antagonistic logic that makes the followers of these narratives say that the other myths have no right to be there. The Holocaust, the arch-narrative of the politics of regret, is supposed to be the founding narrative of a tolerant world, but many parts of this world tolerate no transgressions to their own founding myth. The criminalisation of Holocaust denial is the most obvious example, but some public figures did not have to go so far; many historians and politicians have been ostracised for deviating from the narrow scope of the socially acceptable interpretation of the Holocaust, for attempting to “relativize” this sacred event (see the examples given in the last section). Even though I do not agree with these revisionist accounts, I find the social outrage and ostracisation that they have sparked to be contrary to the tolerant mentality that is supposed to be founded on the memory of the Holocaust. If a community accepts a particular reading of the Holocaust as its foundation myth and then makes this narrative unquestionable, in what ways is this community different from countries in which stories of national glory are sacrosanct, protected and securitised? As Maria Mälksoo stated, “[a]ttempting to forge certain mnemonic consensus as a higher ideal of a cosmopolitan nature (such as Holocaust remembrance in the EU) is not necessarily a more benign version of securitizing historical memory than the parochial nationalist variants.”<sup>235</sup>

It is important to note that I do not mean to suggest that the politics of regret is problematic in every form. A more modest regret which views itself as a myth-as-interpretation is perfectly possible and personally I would be happy if more people shared it than (hopefully equally modest) myths of glory. However, in their current militant form, most instantiations of the politics of regret are no better than any other myth-as-truth. The *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is viewed as a “critical” and “self-reflexive” form of memory by its supporters, but I do not see how a process

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<sup>235</sup> Mälksoo, “Memory Must Be Defended,” 228.

whose end point is fixed to be a social consensus about regret and apology can be labelled as such. The type of self-reflection that I have outlined so far is always open-ended, always involves a lot of possible outcomes and is not even necessarily geared towards reaching an outcome or changing anything. Viewed in this light, the politics of regret is certainly self-critical (and sometimes even self-flagellatory), but it is certainly not self-reflexive.

To sum up, so far ethics of memory have focused too much on the mode of emplotment of a narrative (whether it is self-congratulatory or self-flagellatory, traditional or regretful). I argue that it would make more sense to concentrate on an ethically much more significant issue, namely on how narratives are often exclusionary in the sense that they exclude the possibility of representing a certain part of the past in any other way (or at least in a way that is significantly different from theirs). The claim to represent or approximate the historical truth, instead of solving conflicts and settling debates, effectively contributes to the development and perpetuation of an antagonistic environment where the different sides are deaf to each other's arguments because they fundamentally reject the possibility of holding the other's views. Approaching this assumption more critically would be a major step towards a more agonistic environment where conflict is still very much present, but participants view each other as legitimate adversaries rather than enemies. The following three chapters will outline the practical implications of this assertion with respect to the behaviour of the state, the individual, and the organisation of education.

## **Myths and the State**

For the purposes of this ethical framework, I distinguish between four types of state action: states can project, support, challenge or censor narratives. The direct projection of a narrative is the public representation of a certain past event by state organs and officials. This is often in line with the dominant narrative or set of narratives in a given society, but it does not need to be (and is usually not) a single, homogenous narrative that enjoys the consensus of every government official, let alone of every citizen. "National" representations of the past in the form of memorial days, monuments, songs and museums may enjoy vast popular support, but they are rarely (if ever) completely uncontested, and these very symbols are open to multiple competing interpretations. The national history curriculum, for instance, can be considered a set of state-projected narratives; but it must also be noted that even if history textbooks often need to be approved by the state, there is usually a wide range of substantially different textbooks that school teachers can use. The ruling political party or parties tend to promote their own narrative, and after a change of government this state-projected version of the past can easily change. Additionally, different state organs and different levels of government often articulate different myths; local



authorities, for example, can be more likely to erect monuments with controversial historical interpretations, while official state monuments are generally more consensual.

The state can also support a narrative which means its promotion by ways that are more indirect than outright projection. This practically means the “soft” or indirect promotion of a narrative by the political authority; instead of directly projecting the myth to its citizens, the state commends the narrative for its certain qualities. For instance, the state can recognise some myths as historically accurate and/or morally commendable, and can generally encourage their public representation (by supporting, financially or otherwise, the privately initiated cultural projects which make these historical statements, or by providing a platform for their representation). On the contrary, the state can also challenge some interpretations of the past by declaring them historically inaccurate and/or morally reprehensible, and generally discouraging its public representation (by withdrawing or withholding financial and other kinds of support from the projects that articulate these narratives, by distancing itself from them, or by operating a no-platforming policy with respect to their advocates). Finally, states can censor some narratives by criminalising their public representation and by actively preventing them from reaching the public. In the following, I will outline what the pluralist ethics of myth thinks about these four types of state action.

The radical democratic critique of liberalism takes issue with the principle of state neutrality mostly on the grounds that aggregationist and accommodationist liberal theories envision a state that proclaims itself to be neutral in the face of different conceptions of the “good life,” but *in practice* embodies and reinforces a very particular worldview. But it is also difficult to imagine how the state could be completely neutral *in principle*. It needs to be established on the basis of some norms and rules; it needs to communicate to its citizens in fulfilling its basic functions (such as education), communication requires the use of language, and language is inevitably laden with values. For these reasons, the emphasis should not be on how the state can be neutral. Given that the state is necessarily committed to some normative ideals, the emphasis should be on how it should act with respect to these values and how these values should be (re)constituted and (re)interpreted.

The pluralist approach holds that if the state is inevitably caught up in some normative commitments, the least it should do is to be open about these values, be self-reflective about their contingent nature, and be open towards the reconstitution and reinterpretation of these values through democratic contestation. This means that the main problem with duty-based ethics of memory is not that they expect the state to project or support certain historical narratives, but that

the state is supposed to do this in a rather dogmatic way, as if those narratives expressed the indisputable moral and historical truth. In contrast, a pluralist framework envisages a state that, depending on the context, can promote the values and the historical content that is deemed desirable by duty-based ethical accounts, but the state should do this in a way that acknowledges the existence of these values and their contingency as well as the uncertainty of historical knowledge.

The actual normative commitments of the state and their interpretations are subject to the ever-changing dynamics of democratic contestation, but in my ethical framework I express a hope that these will tend to be commitments to the liberal values of liberty and equality, and a trust in, and respect for, the results of academic research. That is, the state will hopefully regard the discipline of history and science in general as its main source of knowledge. However, the ideals of openness and self-reflectivity for which I argued above require the state to be open about these commitments and to acknowledge that this is not the only way to look at the past and the world. If the state does share these commitments, in general it can justifiably project and support historical narratives if the following criteria are satisfied:

- the narratives are widely regarded in the discipline of history as highly accurate;
- the ethical values embedded in these narratives conform to the liberal values to which the state subscribes;
- the narratives themselves and the way they are projected or supported by the state are open about their contingent nature and fallibility (that is, by openly admitting that the standards of evaluation of the discipline of history are not absolute, that the mode of emplotment of the narrative is a somewhat arbitrary choice, and that historical narratives are practically and essentially incomplete anyway);
- generally, the state pays particular attention to minority narratives that fit these criteria.

Depending on the context, there can be deviations from these general criteria, of course. In certain historical situations, projecting or supporting narratives that do not satisfy these criteria but whose projection has huge socially beneficial net effects might be justified. In times of social crisis or war, for instance, it might be ethically defensible to violate these criteria to a certain extent. If projecting or supporting a historically inaccurate narrative and/or projecting or supporting it in a somewhat dogmatic way might prevent internal armed conflict, international war, the collapse of the state or some other highly undesirable situation, then the state action of projection or support might be a necessary evil in order to avert some greater evil. In peacetime and in established democracies, however, there are rarely sufficient grounds for violating these criteria.

This does not mean that the state is free to project and support myths as long as they conform to these criteria. Whenever the state promotes the constitutive narrative of a certain identity group, it effectively marginalises the myths of other social groups. Minority voices are inevitably the easiest targets of this marginalisation; even if they are not excluded from the mythscape in principle, they can be effectively ignored if the state aggressively propagates its own narrative. Whether created by benign neglect or deliberate exclusion, this institutionalised ignorance can even be considered a form of humiliation. In practice, “[t]he dominant ‘shared memories’ of all modern states are repositories of humiliation... There are no examples in modern history of non-discriminating, non-exclusionary national mythologies.”<sup>236</sup> The pluralist state is therefore generally expected to refrain from employing its powers to aggressively propagate its own values and preferred myths, and to keep the projection and the support of myths to a minimum and to the contexts where it has good reasons to do so (for instance, in history textbooks and education which will be explored in detail in a later section).

In fact, the central projection and support of historical narratives can sometimes run against other, probably more important, objectives of the state such as the reduction of antagonism and the encouragement of understanding. The projection or support of a historical narrative amount to a positive recognition as the state deems its interpretive framework ethically appropriate and/or its content historically accurate. The state must single out certain narratives for positive recognition as recognising all myths equally is clearly not a viable option. If the state recognised all myths with their different interpretive frameworks, it would mean that the state positively affirmed widely different and fundamentally incompatible ethical and onto-epistemological choices. This would only make sense if the state did not uphold the narrative itself (its interpretive framework and historical accuracy), but if it valued the fact that it is different from the others, that its

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<sup>236</sup> Bell, “Agonistic Democracy and the Politics of Memory,” 157.

recognition would increase the overall diversity of the mythscape. The positive recognition of all myths is sensible if and only if the ever higher diversity of the mythscape was the state's sole priority. I agree with Connolly that this type of pluralisation, the drive towards more differences for the sake of having more differences, can easily have adverse social consequences and should not be the guiding principle of the state.

If diversity for the sake of diversity is not the goal of the state, by positively recognising certain narratives, the state singles out some as more valuable than others which inevitably contributes to the development of a hierarchy between narratives. Apart from the institutional ignorance and marginalisation of (mostly) minority narratives discussed above, this hierarchy has two other consequences. On the one hand, it leads to a competition for positive recognition among narratives. As positive recognition cannot be universal for the reasons mentioned in the previous paragraph, unrecognised narratives need to compete with each other for affirmation by the state. Victimhood narratives are particularly prone to this phenomenon and the “competition of victims”<sup>237</sup> has become particularly acute with the spread of the politics of regret. As the number of official state apologies for past misdeeds rose, so did the number of calls for the recognition of victimhood. However, the groups with these victimhood identities more often than not took recognition and solidarity to be limited social resources, believing that the more victims are recognised, the less attention each victim receives. Pieter Lagrou lamented that we “always commemorate and recognize some [victims] at the expense of others... Such a process is inherent in the political struggle for public recognition, which is a scarce commodity.”<sup>238</sup> Since its rise to transnational prominence, the commemoration of the Holocaust has been routinely accused of “crowding out” solidarity with other victims of the past and the present.

On the other hand, the hierarchy between narratives means that there are established, widely recognised narratives that can serve as templates for similar myths that still seek recognition. The commemoration of the Holocaust has been defended on these grounds. With his concept of multidirectional memory explained in Chapter 2, Rothberg argued that the commemoration of victimhood is not a zero-sum game in which the solidarity gained by one victimhood narrative is a loss of another. According to him, instead of crowding out the commemoration of other victims, the globalisation of the Holocaust has provided a platform and a template based upon which victimhood narratives can be effectively articulated.

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<sup>237</sup> Chaumont, *La concurrence des victimes*.

<sup>238</sup> Pieter Lagrou, “Europe as a Place for Common Memories? Some Thoughts on Victimhood, Identity and Emancipation from the Past,” in *Clashes in European Memory: The Case of Communist Repression and the Holocaust*, ed. Muriel Blaive, Christian Gerbel, and Thomas Lindenberger (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2011), 287.

Crudely put, the essence of the debate is whether the multiplication and the recognition of victimhood narratives alter the partition or the size of the solidarity cake. The proponents of the competition view think that the more recognised narratives struggle for solidarity, the thinner the slices from the solidarity cake will be for each. The defenders of multidirectionality believe that the amount of social attention paid to victims (the size of the cake) is not an immovable constant; the more established and recognised some victimhood narratives become, the more public attention is devoted to past wrongs and the easier it is for unrecognised victimhood myths to get a slice of the growing solidarity cake.

The problem with the debate about competition and multidirectionality is that at this point it could only be resolved with more empirical evidence, but it is extremely difficult (or even impossible) to determine the “net effect” of the multiplication of recognised victim stories, that is, the way they alter the partition and the size of the solidarity cake. If the cake is becoming bigger, but more people are having it, are the slices going to become bigger or smaller? The answer, as ever, is that it depends on the situation. But, as Jan-Werner Müller said, there is no way to ascertain empirical claims about whether empathy with past victims “will drive out other kinds of solidarity—or that it might, instead, make societies as a whole more sensitive to wrongs and instances of open or hidden violence in the present.”<sup>239</sup> Similarly, it is not possible to demonstrate whether calls for empathy with past victims crowd each other out or provide a template for each other. Without such evidence, questions about the relative strength of the crowding-out effect and the template effect remain questions of faith and, as such, in principle unresolvable. What is clear is that the ambiguity of the effect of narrative hierarchy created by positive recognition reinforces the previous assertion that the state needs to be cautious about projecting or supporting myths. The pluralist state needs to carefully balance between the necessity and the social benefit of such actions, on the one hand, and their possible negative impact on the realisation of its primary objectives in this respect, that is, on its ability to reduce antagonism by creating an inclusive mythscape and encouraging dialogue.

When it comes to censorship, the pluralist state rarely has sufficient grounds to prohibit the public representation of historical narratives. If we accept that there is no one morally and historically right reading of the past, it is difficult to see on what grounds historical narratives should not be allowed to be represented in the public space. Bell similarly argued that

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<sup>239</sup> Jan-Werner Müller, “On ‘European Memory’: Some Conceptual and Normative Remarks,” in *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*, ed. Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 34.

“[c]onceptions of the past should not be censored”<sup>240</sup> and made an important analytical distinction between the content of historical narratives and the political programme which they are used to bolster. He thought that it is not the content of narratives that the state should make judgements about, but the policy programmes for whose legitimation these myths are used. “If such political programs do not accord with the minimal necessary conditions for fostering democracy—if, for example, they threaten violence—then they can justifiably be proscribed.”<sup>241</sup> However, myths should not be excluded from the mythscape even if they are associated with these programmes. It must be noted that Bell acknowledged that an absolutely clear separation between the political agenda of a group and its supporting mythical account is not possible. In most cases, the policy preferences of a group and the ethical values embedded in the interpretive framework of its myth are intimately related. Bell nevertheless thought that the analytical separation of the policy programme and the content of a myth is important when the state is contemplating intervention.

This promising separation between myths and policy programmes needs to be fleshed out. Most importantly, we need to be clearer about what Bell called the “content” of historical narratives. In my terminology, content stands for the two interconnected parts of the narrative: the historical statements and the interpretive framework. Consequently, the general prohibition of state intervention in the mythscape needs to be defended in the face of two scenarios. In the first case, we need to show that a narrative should not be censored if its interpretive framework is democratic, but it is used to legitimate an openly undemocratic policy programme. Consider, for instance, the situation in which two different identity groups employ the same narrative to support two different political agendas, one violent and another completely peaceful. In this case, it would surely be unfair to censor the narrative and thus penalise the group with the peaceful agenda. If the problem is with the policy programme that the myth is used to legitimate, the state should be concerned with the programme instead of the myth. The second scenario is trickier. Here, we need to show that even if a narrative’s interpretive framework contains elements that openly violate basic democratic principles (for instance, if an ethical value embedded in the myth is the persecution of certain ethnic groups), it should still not be censored. There are several reasons for this. First, these undemocratic elements are not articulated policy programmes; they do not directly and automatically lead to undemocratic political tendencies. In order to become guidelines for action, they need to be used by certain groups to support their (ethical or unethical) political agendas. The state, in turn, can justifiably act against these programmes instead of questionably excluding myths on the basis that they might be translated into a political agenda which might lead

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

to undemocratic actions. Second, it is all too often the suppression of certain readings of the past by legal means that renders undemocratic political tendencies more likely. As Bell noted, “mythologies do not simply disappear if they are ignored; indeed, such silencing can fuel resentment and hatred, catalyzing spirals of distrust.”<sup>242</sup> As sanctioning a historical account by legal means usually exacerbates the feelings of exclusion, marginalisation and victimisation in the group that wishes to promote the narrative in question, such measures often prove to be counterproductive. For these reasons, as a general rule the pluralist state does not prohibit the representation of historical narratives because of their content or interpretive framework, and resorts to censorship only in extreme circumstances (internal conflict, war, etc.). The other method to take action against historical narratives, to challenge them, is “softer” than censorship and can sometimes be ethically defensible, but any potential social benefits arising from this challenge need to be weighed against how this action contributes to the development of narrative hierarchy and thus to resentment and antagonism.

So far, I explained when the pluralist state may be justified to take the four possible actions towards a particular myth. Some of these actions and some forms of these actions were argued to be generally more acceptable than others, but the state was expected to be cautious and to take these actions only if it has good reason to. The rationale behind this caution is that any state action can have adverse side effects, that is, it can endanger the realisation of other norms and state objectives. In peacetime and in established democracies, one of the primary goals of the pluralist state is taken to be to embrace the inevitable social condition of dissensus so that differences can become agonistic in nature, to reduce the prevalence of antagonistic relationships in the society. Positive recognition (that is, projection and support), challenge and censorship can all have social repercussions that undermine the realisation of this aim. For this reason, the pluralist state can often do the most for the reduction of antagonism by taking actions with respect to the totality of myths, the mythscape, rather than particular historical narratives. The state can do the most for an agonistic society by organising a mythscape in a pluralist way, by creating a platform where all myths can confront each other and can engage with each other in dialogue. For this, it needs to take the following measures:

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

- the simultaneous acknowledgement and challenge of all myths
- critical education (the education of critical tools for the evaluation of myths)
- sentimental education (the “emotional manipulation” of citizens)

The following two sections will consider these measures in detail.

## Pluralist Mythscape

Instead of taking action against particular narratives, the state can usually do the most for the reduction of antagonism by organising a pluralist mythscape. A crucial measure in this vein is the simultaneous acknowledgement and challenge of all myths, an idea first proposed by Bell. On the one hand, he claimed that all myths deserve to be acknowledged at a public level irrespective of their content (that is, their historical accuracy and their choice of interpretive framework). Recognition and acknowledgement are very difficult concepts which is illustrated by Paul Ricoeur’s collection of twenty-three different understandings of recognition.<sup>243</sup> For my purposes, it is sufficient to distinguish between the positive recognition of a narrative and its acknowledgement. Positive recognition means that the public representation of a narrative is affirmed as valuable and ethically good. This can happen for a variety of reasons; for instance, a narrative can be upheld because it is deemed historically true and accurate, because it teaches people a moral story, because its representation serves justice to victims or because it brings glory to the nation. In contrast, the acknowledgement of a narrative only entails the acceptance that the story has as much right to be publicly represented as any other. As Bell put it, acknowledgement

is not synonymous with the sorts of Hegelian-inspired demands for “recognition” advanced in much recent political theory. Rather than positively affirming the distinctive qualities of other identities, it simply concedes the importance of identity-constitution for individual and collective identities and the rights of groups to make claims and present a public face based on this fact. This does not preclude positive endorsement, but it does not demand it. This signals, then, a type of “formal” rather than “substantive” recognition, in Patchen Markell’s terms, signifying equal inclusion in a process whereby identities are contested and remade rather than a claim about the necessity of affirmation.<sup>244</sup>

The acknowledgement of a narrative therefore should not be understood as positive appraisal or recognition in the Hegelian sense; it does not mean that the narrative in question is ethically good, historically accurate or socially beneficial. What it does mean is that any account of the past deserves to be part of the public discourse, that its content and historical accuracy should

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<sup>243</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>244</sup> Bell, “Agonistic Democracy and the Politics of Memory,” 158; Patchen Markell, “Recognition and Redistribution,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, ed. John S. Dryzek, Bonnie Honig, and Anne Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 450–69.



not be a basis for its marginalisation, exclusion or suppression. In fact, it does not say anything about the value of the narrative or that of its representation, about its historical veracity or moral worth. Without such evaluative criteria, the acknowledgement of all narratives is more likely to lead to a truly inclusive mythscape than the four state actions discussed in the previous section. Competition and conflict remain a central feature of an acknowledgement-based mythscape, but there is an important difference with regard to positive recognition. In the former, different narratives which are already accepted in the mythscape struggle for dominance; in the latter, they compete for inclusion in the mythscape of the privileged. The question about complementarity and competition, about whether different myths reinforce each other or crowd each other out, is not solved, but it becomes less relevant in the case of acknowledgement. As every narrative has the right to be included in the mythscape, the struggle between insiders and outsiders is turned into a dialogue within insiders; antagonistic relationships can be turned into agonistic ones. In this case, we can arrive at a mythscape where the acknowledgement of victimhood is truly not a zero-sum game.

Putting more emphasis on the acknowledgement of all myths than state actions towards particular myths means that the two problematic scenarios associated from the latter, namely narrative hierarchy and pluralisation, are less likely to occur. If all narratives deserve to be acknowledged and to be publicly represented irrespective of their content, historical accuracy or ethical stance, hierarchy is less of an issue; in the case of acknowledgement, there is little room for official differentiation between narratives based on some (necessarily contingent) set of criteria, and for the resulting (necessarily arbitrary) choices about the inclusion and exclusion of voices in the mythscape of the “recognised.” With respect to the second scenario, I follow Connelly in regarding plurality as an inevitable and even desirable social condition whose acknowledgement opens the possibility of mutually enriching dialogue between participants. However, pluralisation, the movement towards more diversity for the sake of diversity, can have adverse side-effects and usually carries more risks than opportunities. For this reason, the pluralist state envisioned here acknowledges the diversity of myths in society, but does not actively promote (or discourage, for that matter) ever higher levels of diversity.

The acknowledgement of all myths, however, is not sufficient in itself for the development of a pluralist mythscape. The state also needs to provide a platform where all narratives (and especially minority views) can be effectively represented and can engage with each other in dialogue. This can be a virtual or actual social space, a “mythspace,” where organised identity groups can openly present their myths, can understand each other’s views and can thus come to see other as adversaries rather than enemies. In Europe, the obvious candidates for the

creation of such social spaces are museums. In the last few decades, the conceptions of museums have undergone significant changes from rather top-down institutions where traditional dominant nationalist narratives are projected to more inclusive and more self-reflective places. (At least) some of these places (at least partly) should be devoted to the creation of such inclusive mythspaces where visitors and organised identity groups are creators as much as receivers of content (see the discussion on the House of European History in Chapter 6 for more details).

The arguments above imply that even historically inaccurate and (from a liberal point of view) ethically reprehensible narratives need to be acknowledged and allowed to represent themselves in mythscapes. Let us again take the extreme case of Holocaust denial as the “hard case” for these arguments. There are three reasons why even such narratives should be acknowledged and included in mythspaces in an agonistic democracy. First, the question should not be why these myths should be acknowledged and included, but why they should not be acknowledged and on what grounds they should be excluded. The reasons that might be given for the exclusion of these myths are that they are historically inaccurate, they do not subscribe to liberal ethics, they employ an inappropriate mode of emplotment, and/or that they portray themselves to be the truth. Whichever of these reasons are chosen, it would be difficult to construct robust criteria for exclusion around them. At what degree of historical inaccuracy or deviation from liberal values should a myth be excluded? And, more importantly, given that the pluralist state subscribes to liberal values and to the discipline of history, but also considers these choices contingent rather than rationally necessary, it does not have a good enough justification to exclude myths that do not subscribe to these choices. Similarly, if all myths-as-truth were deemed unacceptable for acknowledgement and inclusion in the mythspaces, then most contemporary myths would fail to meet this criterion which means that the creation of a mythspace, whose purpose would be to reduce antagonism between these myths, would not make sense.

The most noteworthy objection to the acknowledgement and inclusion of narratives about Holocaust denial is that they can be offensive to some people and may even constitute hate speech. This is a strong argument and there is a vast literature about whether and how concerns about offensiveness and hate speech can impact on the right to freedom of expression.<sup>245</sup> I would defend the acknowledgement and inclusion of extreme voices not on the mostly deontological grounds of free speech, but on more consequentialist grounds. As I argued earlier, the institutional ignorance and exclusion of extremist narratives does not make them vanish, but renders them more latent, more underground, more resentful, and ultimately more difficult to engage with and

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<sup>245</sup> See, for instance, Anthony Cortese, *Opposing Hate Speech* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006).

even to notice. The experience of marginalisation in the adherents of these narratives is a fertile ground for the development of a sense of victimhood and further marginalisation which in the end perpetuates antagonistic relationships in society. Given this consequentialist argument about the usually negative social repercussions of excluding extremist views from the mythscape, the logical question is what, if anything, is to be gained from including these voices.

This question leads us to the third reason why even extremist voices need to be acknowledged and included. The whole point of the mythspace is to encourage dialogue in order to contribute to the development of a pluralist mythscape and to the reduction of antagonism. The idea is that even the most wildly different viewpoints can talk to each other and can learn from each other if they come to see each other as adversaries rather than enemies. If the most antagonised voices were excluded and only those liberal people were included who are already nice and tolerant towards each other, the mythspace would surely serve no real purpose. If the main goal of the pluralist state is to reduce antagonism, then this engagement with extremist voices is necessary. It does not mean, of course, that the state can legally force people to be tolerant towards intolerance, to sit at the same table as Holocaust deniers. But the state should try to encourage these people to talk to each other, because the situation of antagonism will not be solved by mutual disgust and resentment.

Even so, the acknowledgement and inclusion of blatantly inaccurate and illiberal myths is not unproblematic. I argued that the pluralist state should not promote myths-as-truth (or only in very few cases), nor should it censor accounts of the past even if they proclaim to be true and/or they are used by identity groups with openly undemocratic political programmes and/or their interpretive framework contains openly undemocratic elements. Clearly, myths-as-truth with undemocratic elements in their interpretive framework are especially problematic; the truth claims that such myths make do not only give a sense of authority to the narrative itself, but also naturalise and legitimate the undemocratic elements of its framework of interpretation. In general, myths with undemocratic interpretive frameworks are effective at supporting undemocratic political agendas if they proclaim themselves to be the only holder of the truth. If the state is expected to acknowledge all myths but not to project some authoritative version of the past that legitimates the prevailing social order, how is it supposed to approach the problem of myths-as-truth with undemocratic interpretive frameworks? There must be some kind of response to this problem on behalf of the pluralist state. Bell proposed that this needs to be the challenge of all myth, and that the most powerful tool in the hands of the state to this end is education.

## Myths and Education

In the primary and secondary schools of a pluralist democracy, the content of history education itself is not so different from conventional forms of teaching history in that it relies on the results of research in the discipline of history. This is a situation where the state can justifiably project narratives whose content is in line with its own ideological commitments, that is, with its liberal values and its trust in historical research. However, it needs to project them in a way that is different from more dogmatic forms of history education. First, as opposed to mythistory, the aim of this history education is not to strengthen national unity and legitimate the state (which is not to say that conventional history education is necessarily mythistorical, of course); instead, it subscribes to the critical history tradition in that it is suspicious of authority, pays particular attention to minority narratives and, most importantly, is open and self-reflective about the limitations of historical knowledge and its performativity in society. History education in a pluralist democracy thus does not present its assertions as the objective truth about the past, but as the current state of affairs in a particular (and particularly sophisticated) discourse called the discipline of history. Importantly, it even teaches about narratives that are deemed ethically reprehensible and historically inaccurate by the state. This is not teaching in the very traditional sense (that is, top-down transmission of content that is deemed to be the truth), but teaching that encourages discussion and self-reflection about controversial issues while clearly noting that the state does not recognise these narratives as ethically or historically appropriate.

This approach to the teaching of history is complemented by two other forms of education about myths, one appealing to reason and the other to emotions. These are educational approaches which are meant to contribute to the effectiveness of dialogue and to the reduction of antagonism. The rationalistic tool, critical education, challenges all narratives by encouraging a critical attitude towards all publicly represented historical accounts, while the emotional tool, sentimental education, aims to foster tolerance and dialogue between different historical narratives by encouraging empathy between their supporters.

Critical education constitutes a challenge of the totality of myths in that it encourages a critical attitude towards all myths. Most importantly, it encourages a critical attitude towards all exclusionary tendencies, and thus towards all myths that present themselves as the only possible true readings of the past. It challenges these exclusionary traits by adopting a critical approach towards the notion of absolute historical knowledge and teaching the tools with which myths can be assessed. The aim of this education is to encourage people to bring into question the assumptions about moral and historical truth which, as I have argued, sustain the present

antagonistic arrangements. This approach is not exclusionary as it acknowledges that all myths deserve to be represented, even those that claim incontestability, but at the same time it consciously tries to undermine the incontestability assumption that gives strength to myths-as-truth. The importance of critical education follows from the insight developed in the previous chapter, namely that individuals are not mere products and captives of social structures and identity-constitutive mythologies, but, to some extent, are also capable of critically evaluating and challenging them. The latter is especially important as it is admittedly difficult to imagine a situation in which the state acts as a benevolent guardian over the mythscape and refrains from favouring certain narratives while marginalising others. The exclusionary tendencies of mythologies, however, could be successfully tamed if social agents were more aware of the uncertainty and the complexity of the past and were better equipped with the tools necessary to take a more critical stance towards narratives making truth claims. Academia and, perhaps even more importantly, primary and secondary education have a special responsibility in this process. While supporting the acknowledgement of the right to existence of all interpretations of the past, critical education needs to promote scepticism towards mythical truth claims, teach the tools with which myths of any kind can be critically evaluated, emphasise the uncertainty and fallibility of historical knowledge, and raise awareness of the exclusionary characteristics of the narratives that portray themselves as the truth. Above all, critical education challenges the exclusionary features of myths-as-truth, their insistence on one particular reading of past events and their tendency to present themselves as natural, neutral, consensual, commonsensical. These truth claims render myths-as-truth mutually exclusive and challenging them would take us much closer to a more agonistic mythscape.

I propose that the other method to change mutually exclusive relationships could be what Richard Rorty called sentimental education. With respect to the global human rights regime, Rorty was dissatisfied with how “exclusionary” views, which did not subscribe to the human rights ideals, are treated. These groups are readily labelled irrational, bigoted, backward, barbaric, animalistic, infantile, subhuman or pseudohuman as opposed to us, the rational, modern, civilised, Enlightened, progressive, mature, true human beings who are on the right side of history.

We Eurocentric intellectuals like to suggest that we, the paradigm humans, have overcome this primitive parochialism by using that paradigmatic human faculty, reason. So we say that failure to concur with us is due to “prejudice.”<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Richard Rorty, “Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality,” in *Truth and Progress* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 126.

Thus, in the spirit of “never tolerate intolerance,” the paradigm humans ostracise the irrational, non-paradigmatic humans.

[S]tudents who have been brought up in the shadow of the Holocaust, brought up believing that prejudice against racial and religious groups is a terrible thing, ... imagine themselves in the shoes of the despised and oppressed. Such students are already so nice that they are eager to define their identity in nonexclusionary terms. The only people they have trouble being nice to are the ones they consider irrational—the religious fundamentalist, the smirking rapist, or the swaggering skinhead.<sup>247</sup>

This is not to say that the underlying assumption about humanity, the human rights regime or the education of the Holocaust are flawed. However, the rational-irrational distinction is.

Producing generations of nice, tolerant, well-off, secure, other-respecting students of this sort in all parts of the world is just what is needed... The more youngsters like this we can raise, the stronger and more global our human rights culture will become. But it is not a good idea to encourage these students to label “irrational” the intolerant people they have trouble tolerating. For that Platonic-Kantian epithet suggests that, with only a little more effort, the good and rational part of these other people’s souls could have triumphed over the bad and irrational part. It suggests that we good people know something these bad people do not know, and that it is probably their own silly fault that they do not know it. All they have to do, after all, is to think a little harder, be a little more self-conscious, a little more rational.<sup>248</sup>

Rorty argued that the “exclusionary” groups do have a rationality of their own; they just do not happen to buy into the basic universalist assumption that belonging to a larger group, to the biological species of humanity, trumps other kinds of group membership.

But the bad people’s beliefs are not more or less “irrational” than the belief that race, religion, gender, and sexual preference are all morally irrelevant—that these are all trumped by membership in the biological species... It would be better to teach our students that these bad people are no less rational, no less clearheaded, no more prejudiced, than we good people who respect otherness. The bad people’s problem is that they were not so lucky in the circumstances of their upbringing as we were... we should treat them as deprived. Foundationalists think of these people as deprived of truth, of moral knowledge. But it would be better—more specific, more suggestive of possible remedies—to think of them as deprived of two more concrete things: security and sympathy.<sup>249</sup>

Because the radically different assumptions about the social world of the liberals and the “intolerants” are not due to the existence and the lack of the faculty of reason, such deeply ingrained differences are unlikely to be moved by rationalistic tools such as critical education. Rorty

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 126–127.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 127–128.

therefore suggested that education in this case should be based on sentiment rather than reason. The moral educator's task is not to

answer the rational egotist's question "Why should I be moral?" but rather to answer the much more frequently posed question "Why should I care about a stranger, a person who is no kin to me, a person whose habits I find disgusting?" The traditional answer to the latter question is "Because kinship and custom are morally irrelevant, irrelevant to the obligations imposed by the recognition of membership in the same species." This has never been very convincing, since it begs the question at issue: whether mere species membership is, in fact, a sufficient surrogate for closer kinship... A better sort of answer is the sort of long, sad, sentimental story which begins "Because this is what it is like to be in her situation—to be far from home, among strangers," or "Because she might become your daughter-in-law," or "Because her mother would grieve for her." Such stories, repeated and varied over the centuries, have induced us, the rich, safe, powerful, people, to tolerate, and even to cherish, powerless people—people whose appearance or habits or beliefs at first seemed an insult to our own moral identity, our sense of the limits of permissible human variation.<sup>250</sup>

Analogously, in the case of (traditional or regretful) identity-constitutive narratives, the rational egotist's question is "Why should I care about the historical lies of this stranger that dishonour the nation/the memory of the victims?" The traditional answer that critical education provides goes like this: "Because historical narratives are always partial and there is no authoritative account of any historical event, because just the fact that a narrative has a self-congratulatory or a self-flagellatory tone does not render it morally desirable or reprehensible." This is unlikely to convince many believers of myths-as-truth. The long, sentimental answer, on the other hand, could be that "Because he has been endlessly repeating this story to himself in order to reduce his feelings of loneliness and insecurity," or "Because he might become your son-in-law," or "Because if you stigmatize him, he would feel even more lonely and insecure." There is no guarantee that this kind of answer would be more effective, of course, but it is at least another, potentially less intellectually condescending, method in the educational repertoire.

The paradox of liberal democratic theories indeed lies in their ability to tolerate almost every difference and their inability to meaningfully engage with the radically different. The language used by the proponents of political regret to describe the traditional approaches to the past is strikingly similar to how the paradigm humans talk about the "exclusionists." Framing differences between the supporters of regretful and traditional memories in terms of dichotomies such as the mature and the immature, the rational and the irrational, the objective and the emotional, the enlightened and the backward, is in principle unjustified and in practice ineffective. It is in principle unjustified not only because it posits that a set of irrefutable evaluative criteria exists and can be

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 133–134.

known, but also because it is built on a self-serving understanding of rationality from which radically dissenting voices are excluded by definitional *fiat*. However, just as Rorty argued that there is nothing fundamentally rational or irrational about believing in (or, for that matter, refusing to believe) in our shared humanity, I argue that there is nothing fundamentally rational or irrational about telling stories about one's own past misdeeds, one's heroism or one's suffering. Particular stories can certainly differ with respect to how well they are supported by historical evidence, but in and of itself the preference for one "tone" or another has nothing to do with rationality. Myths of regret, glory, heroism and victimhood do not differ from each other because some of them are more rational or less political than others, but because they rely on markedly different ethical assumptions. As I noted earlier, I would personally be happy to see more people supporting a more regretful approach to their past, but I certainly do not delude myself into thinking that this behaviour would be more rational or morally superior according to some absolute standard.

The name-calling strategy is also in practice ineffective. Treating those who do not follow the politics of regret as immature and irrational is likely to be counterproductive because it reinforces their feelings of marginalisation, insecurity and inferiority from which their need for stories about heroes and self-pity actually stem. Refusing to take them seriously out of some misplaced sense of moral superiority actually sends them the message that the supporters of the politics of regret are afraid to engage in debate because they do not have a compelling enough argument, because they are the irrational ones who try to resolve every confrontation by appealing to their abstract moral dogmas. Finally, external pressure and persecution, whether real or imagined, can further increase the appeal of opinion formers within the group that refuses to pursue the politics of regret as it gives them the opportunity to portray themselves as the bearers of forbidden knowledge and as the protectors of the honour of the community.

For this reason, instead of arguing for negative, regretful, self-flagellatory as opposed to positive, uplifting, self-congratulatory narratives (or the other way around), I maintain that ethical judgements about myths should not be primarily made on the basis of their "tone," but on the basis of their honesty about their mythical status. Myths that are open about the partialness of the historical knowledge that they present are thus taken to be more desirable than myths that claim to represent the ultimate moral and historical truth. The reason why discussion about past events is currently all too often characterised by antagonism is not that some immature people prefer comforting stories of glory to the painful acknowledgement of guilt; the reason is that when myths-as-truth face each other off, the outcome cannot conceivably be non-antagonistic. I thus propose a dialogical and pluralist ethics of myth, with an emphasis on critical and sentimental education, within which such antagonistic relationships could hopefully be overcome. The goal is not to



convince each other, to arrive at a consensus, or to destroy the “Other’s” irrational views, but to come to see each other as adversaries that rightfully share a dialogical field.

### **Transgressing Sacred Myths-As-Truth**

I finish this chapter with a short overview of real world examples that is meant to illustrate some of the points that have been made in this rather abstract theoretical discussion, and to support the empirical claims that underlie these arguments. Specifically, I aim to elaborate on my statements about the relationship between regretful and traditional myths. The observation that the politics of regret has been challenging and even replacing national narratives of glory, heroism and victimhood in many parts of Europe in the last fifty years is widely accepted. What is much more controversial is my emphasis on the similarities between regretful and traditional myths as the two are commonly presented as completely different from each other. In the following, I will clarify what I mean by this and will provide justifications for the claim. Importantly, this is not meant to be a section on the commemoration of the Holocaust, but given that political regret is so intimately connected to this historical event, it will inevitably take the centre stage in the discussion.

There are four prominent criticisms that supporters of the politics of regret raise against traditional myths: they are presented as morally decrepit, historically false, exclusionist and political. If we translate this to my conceptual framework, this means that traditional myths are claimed to be built on ethically unacceptable interpretive frameworks, historically inaccurate (given their own framework of interpretation), loaded with claims about the moral and historical truth, and constitutive of a political identity. As I personally happen to agree with some ethical standards embedded in the politics of regret (at least with its preference for stories about suffering over stories about glory, for self-critical narratives over self-congratulatory ones, for universal ties between humans over particular ones), I agree with the first criticism. However, I am aware that these ethical standards are my personal preferences and not absolute ones which any rational human being would necessarily come to accept. As such, the effectiveness of the first criticism is contingent upon an agreement about basic ethical standards.

I also agree with the proponents of regret that most real world examples of myths of glory, heroism and victimhood do fall prey to the second and the third criticism. Most actual nationalist narratives are indeed historically inaccurate even by the standards of their own framework of interpretation and they do portray themselves as the only morally and historically right readings of the past. Where I fundamentally differ from the advocates of political regret, however, is that I am convinced that these three important qualities of a narrative (its interpretive

framework, its historical accuracy and its exclusionary nature) are independent of each other. This means that just because a myth is built on an interpretive framework that valorises a self-congratulatory tone over a regretful one (or vice versa), it does not necessarily mean that this myth is historically inaccurate and/or exclusionist (or the contrary). In order to support this argument, I will show that

- a) traditional myths can *in principle* be historically accurate and/or non-exclusionist
- b) some regretful myths are *in practice* historically inaccurate and/or exclusionist

The first, theoretical claim is relatively easy to justify given my previous arguments in this chapter. Following Hayden White, I asserted that even a myth with a morally reprehensible interpretive framework can be historically accurate. This means that even if we do not accept the ethical standards embedded in the interpretive framework of traditional myths, there is no reason to believe that all narratives whose themes are glory, heroism and victimhood are historically inaccurate. I would add now that they are not even necessarily exclusionary. Let us take the hypothetical Neo-Nazi version of the Holocaust that White has put forward. It can quite possibly be historically accurate as well as non-exclusionist in the sense that it might not make any historical or moral truth claims. It is perfectly conceivable that it does not portray itself to be the only morally and historically right narrative, as the only narrative that can justifiably be publicly represented about this particular historical event.<sup>251</sup> Although I admit that it would be difficult to name any actual traditional myths that are historically accurate and non-exclusionary, I maintain that these qualities are independent from each other and traditional myths can *in principle* be so. It is important to note that my aim here is by no means to defend or promote traditional modes of dealing with past events. The point I make is simply that there is no deterministic connection between the theme of a narrative (glory, heroism, victimhood or even regret) and its historical accuracy and/or its exclusionary tendencies.<sup>252</sup>

In order to justify this point further, I turn to the second, empirical claim which states that not only regretful myths can in principle be historically inaccurate and/or exclusionist, but they sometimes are so in practice. In supporting this proposition, the “hard case”<sup>253</sup> would be real

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<sup>251</sup> Naturally, it can still be considered exclusionist in the sense that its interpretive framework posits that there is a difference between humans and pseudo-humans. However, based on Rorty, I argued that this ethical stance, however condemnable it might seem from our perspective, is not more or less rational than the universalist belief in our shared humanity.

<sup>252</sup> There might admittedly be a spurious relationship between these qualities. For instance, insecure, deprived and marginalised social groups might be particularly receptive to traditional myths and to myths that make historical truth claims. Even if this was the case, their support for traditional myths-as-truth would stem from their preferences for these qualities and it would not mean that traditional myths are necessarily myths-as-truth.

<sup>253</sup> In case study methodology, a hard case is a case that poses a great challenge for a theory.

world representations of the Holocaust. In the following, I will demonstrate that certain actual representations can be subjected to some or all of the four criticisms that the supporters of the politics of regret mount against traditional myths.

Before addressing each of the four criticisms in turn, I will outline the historical context by giving a brief and necessarily sketchy overview of the history of the commemoration of the Holocaust in Europe. The genocide itself was widely known after the Second World War. Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the war, public representations of the past in Germany were characterised by an institutionalised ignorance with respect to the Holocaust in particular, and the war in general, while the dominant myths in other European countries came to be centred around their heroic resistance to Nazism and the suffering that this had caused. As most people were more willing to accept stories that told their own victimhood and their own heroism, there was little room left for, and sometimes even hostility towards, Holocaust survivors and their testimonies. “After years of anti-Semitic propaganda, local populations everywhere were not only disposed to blame ‘Jews’ in the abstract for their own suffering but were distinctly sorry to see the return of men and women whose jobs, possessions and apartments they had purloined.”<sup>254</sup> In Germany, things started changing in the 1960s when the genocide committed against the Jews received more attention as a result of a series of events such as the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem (1961), the trials of Auschwitz guards in Frankfurt (1963-1965) and the student protests of 1968. The iconic moment of this *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* was German Chancellor Willy Brandt kneeling in front of the Warsaw Ghetto memorial in 1970. The following decade was a turning point in several respects. In Germany, after events like the Munich massacre of Israeli athletes (1972) and the broadcast of the American TV series *Holocaust* (1979), popular support for the need to “coming to terms with the past” reached unprecedented levels. The resistance myths prevalent in other Western European countries also came to be challenged by revisionist historians who exposed the extent of collaboration with German authorities. Despite this historical revisionism, the transformation of public representations was slow. In France, for instance, Robert Paxton’s seminal work on Vichy France was published in 1972,<sup>255</sup> but the collaboration in the Holocaust was only officially recognised in 1995 after a series of trials. In other Western European countries (such as Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland), “coming to terms” with collaboration was similarly slow and in some sense it is still ongoing.

In Germany, on the other hand, the view about the duty to remember the unique evil of the Holocaust became so dominant by the 1980s that historical revisionism worked in the opposite

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<sup>254</sup> Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 804.

<sup>255</sup> Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order 1940-1944* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

direction than in other countries. In the *Historikerstreit* (historians' dispute) of the late 1980s, the revisionist historians were a group of right-wing intellectuals led by Ernst Nolte who argued for regarding Nazism and the Holocaust in their historical context. They thought that Germany's past should be "normalised" in the sense that it should be considered in the context of other mass crimes and other totalitarian regimes, notably the Gulag and Stalinism. Left-wing intellectuals, on the other hand, vehemently rejected the possibility of comparison. Led by Habermas, they claimed that Auschwitz was a singular and unique evil and any attempt to historicise it necessarily leads to the unacceptable relativization of Germany's responsibility.

Since this heated exchange, the debate about the comparability of Nazi and communist crimes and the uniqueness of the Holocaust soon spread to other countries; this process was no doubt accelerated by the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In the West, the publication of *Le livre noir du communisme* (*The Black Book of Communism*) in 1997 triggered a similarly emotional debate in France.<sup>256</sup> Stéphane Courtois even enlarged the uniqueness-comparability debate; he counted the number of deaths that can be attributed to communist regimes from all over the world and concluded that communism is responsible for far more deaths than any other ideology, including Nazism. Consequently, the "Communist *Historikerstreit*"<sup>257</sup> also revolved around the question whether a blanket condemnation of communism as an ideology makes sense, whether it should be treated as a single unified phenomenon or as a set of diverse and internally contradictory phenomena.

In the East, where the population of most countries suffered from and collaborated with both types of dictatorships, the "double genocide" theory, which "combines the totalitarian crimes of Hitler and Stalin into a single metanarrative of state violence,"<sup>258</sup> has established itself as an influential framework of interpretation. It is the basis of popular victimhood myths which emphasise the suffering of these nations under both totalitarianisms. This is challenged by advocates of the politics of regret both internally by local cosmopolitan-liberals, and externally by Western governments and other actors. They demand that the people of Eastern European countries should pay more attention to the Holocaust and should acknowledge the collaboration of their states instead of promoting stories of their own victimhood. Supporters of the "double genocide" theory, on the other hand, believe that the crimes of communist regimes (or even those of every totalitarian regime) should be commemorated similarly (or even equally) to the crimes of

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<sup>256</sup> Stéphane Courtois et al., *Le livre noir du communisme : Crimes, terreur, répression* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1997).

<sup>257</sup> Kevin Morgan, "Neither Help nor Pardon? Communist Pasts in Western Europe," in *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*, ed. Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 262.

<sup>258</sup> Uilleam Blacker and Alexander Etkind, "Introduction," in *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, ed. Uilleam Blacker, Alexander Etkind, and Julie Fedor (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 8.

Nazism. Their demand that there should be no first- and second-class victims implicitly challenges the claim that the genocide of the Jews was uniquely evil. Since the Eastern enlargement of 2004, this debate has become more and more pronounced on the European scene and has been labelled the European memory wars. It will be analysed in detail in Part II.

The *Historikerstreit* and its variants, the Communist *Historikerstreit* and the European memory wars, are characterised by strikingly similar patterns. The claim about the uniqueness of the Holocaust and the simultaneous call for the positive recognition of victimhood creates a hierarchy between publicly represented narratives (both within the recognised narratives and between the recognised and the unrecognised ones). This, in turn, triggers a competition between victimhood narratives which the participants aim to settle with what I call “number wars,” the debate about which totalitarian regime is responsible for more deaths committed in more gruesome ways for more monstrous reasons. This debate is utterly pointless in itself, but the bigger problem is that it is rendered completely antagonistic by the fact that most participants frame their arguments in terms of moral and historical truths. For instance, Heidemarie Uhl can claim that the “problematic levelling of the two forms of totalitarianism is at odds with current historical research”<sup>259</sup> while Sandra Kalniete says at the same time that researchers “have shown that both totalitarian regimes—Nazism and Communism—were equally criminal.”<sup>260</sup> In these debates, both sides aim to settle the argument about uniqueness and comparability with more empirical details, more historical discussion, more statistics. What they fail to see is that “the controversy is not an empirical, historical one,”<sup>261</sup> that it is a matter of conscience rather than science.<sup>262</sup>

After this historical overview of the commemoration of the Holocaust, I will give real world examples of political regret to which the four criticisms raised against traditional myths apply. The first criticism was that traditional representations of the past rely on ethically problematic interpretive frameworks. I stated that I mostly agree with this because I sympathise with some elements in the regretful framework, but I also made clear that this should be seen as a personal judgement and not one according to some absolute ethical standards. However, as I have mentioned above, there are some actual representations of political regret, and even of the Holocaust, which rely on frameworks of interpretation that I find morally unacceptable. The most obvious case in point is the kitsch representation (which is not to say that all current

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<sup>259</sup> Aleida Assmann, “Europe’s Divided Memory,” in *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, ed. Uilleam Blacker, Alexander Etkind, and Julie Fedor (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 31.

<sup>260</sup> Sandra Kalniete quoted in Emmanuel Droit, “Le Goulag contre la Shoah: Mémoires officielles et cultures mémorielles dans l’Europe élargie,” *Vingtième siècle: Revue d’histoire*, no. 94 (2007): 101.

<sup>261</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 10.

<sup>262</sup> Chaumont, *La concurrence des victimes*, 10.

representations of the Holocaust are kitsch, of course). In 2001, Kertész lamented on the commodification of Holocaust memory.<sup>263</sup> Sadly, this seems to have necessarily led to its instrumentalization, to what Dan Stone called its “infantalisation,”<sup>264</sup> to its reduction to a didactic and prescriptive morality tale in the service of various political goals of the present. While I admit that the Holocaust has been an invaluable point of reference for the development of the global human rights regime, it is a double-edged sword. In debates about humanitarian intervention, for instance, invoking the Holocaust has been used all too often as an unbeatable trump card in order to “reduce complexity and short-circuit critical reflection for the sake of creating what appears as ‘instant legitimacy’.”<sup>265</sup> The infantile and kitsch representations might also teach the wrong lesson.

By making the Holocaust constitutive of national or European identity or by making it a pedagogical tool inculcating anti-racism or “citizenship,” many of the challenges of the Holocaust—to the idea of progress, to education, to the state, to national identity—are leached out of the story... the unpleasant and uncomfortable has been turned into the very thing with which we comfort ourselves: the fusion of kitsch and death characterised by a “rationalization that normalizes, smoothes, and neutralizes our vision of the past.”<sup>266</sup>

The second criticism is about historical inaccuracy. I realise that talking about certain representations of the Holocaust in these terms can easily be misinterpreted, but I will try to walk on this thin ice. While representations of the Holocaust are certainly not historically false, some of them did contain statements which were later contradicted by emerging new evidence. The most relevant example might be the representation of the *Sonderkommandos*. These special units were composed of Jewish prisoners of extermination camps who were forced to help dispose of the corpses of the gas chamber victims. For a long time, the accounts of the concentration camps depicted the prisoners of the *Sonderkommandos* as “heartless and brutal”<sup>267</sup> based on the testimonies of the camp survivors. They were said to have chased victims into the gas chambers with dogs and truncheons, and to have lived a princely life compared to the other prisoners. Most of the authors of these survivor testimonies, however, never met *Sonderkommando* prisoners because the latter lived separately from the other inmates. If the *Sonderkommando* did meet the others prisoners, they were on their way to the gas chambers and did not live to tell what happened. The first account

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<sup>263</sup> “A Holocaust conformism has arisen, along with a Holocaust sentimentalism, a Holocaust canon, and a system of Holocaust taboos together with the ceremonial discourse that goes with it; Holocaust products for Holocaust consumers have been developed.” Kertész, “Who Owns Auschwitz?,” 269.

<sup>264</sup> Dan Stone, “From Stockholm to Stockholm: The Holocaust and/as Heritage in Britain,” in *Britain and the Holocaust: Remembering and Representing War and Genocide*, ed. Caroline Sharples and Olaf Jensen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 215; 223.

<sup>265</sup> Müller, “On ‘European Memory,’” 33.

<sup>266</sup> Stone, “From Stockholm to Stockholm,” 215; 223.

<sup>267</sup> Deborah Staines, “Knowledge, Memory and Justice: Some Grey Areas in Contemporary Holocaust Research,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 4 (2007): 650.

from someone who had direct contact with *Sonderkommando* members was published by Miklós Nyiszli in 1947 (the English translation appeared in 1960).<sup>268</sup> Nyiszli was an inmate doctor who was part of the *Sonderkommando* but worked under the supervision of Josef Mengele. Although Nyiszli's book was soon questioned for its numerous inconsistencies and inaccuracies, his portrayal of the *Sonderkommando* was taken up by Primo Levi in his influential *The Drowned and the Saved*.<sup>269</sup> It was not until further evidence (such as the testimonies of several former *Sonderkommando* prisoners) began to emerge in the 1980s that these "wrong and defamatory"<sup>270</sup> stereotypes could be challenged and a more accurate account of the *Sonderkommandos* could be obtained.<sup>271</sup>

Finally, public representations of the Holocaust can be, and often are, political and exclusionist. Many of them are political because they constitute identities just as the majority of traditional narratives. At the core of the *Historikerstreit* was the normative debate about what the appropriate myth and type of myth are for the foundation of German identity. Naturally, the debate was also partly about the historical accuracy of particular statements (for instance, Nolte's highly questionable argument about Nazi concentration camps being a defensive measure in reaction to the Gulag), but what was much more pronounced and what rendered the debate so emotional was the identity aspect. Nolte indeed attempted to "normalise" the Holocaust in the sense that he wanted to challenge its unique and special status so as to make Germany a "normal" nation, one that can be proud of the glorious parts of its past; he thus favoured a conventional basis of self-identification. Habermas, on the other hand, explicitly argued for a post-conventional political identity and constitutional patriotism based on universalistic values for which a regretful approach to the past was indispensable.

The history of the commemoration of the Holocaust in Germany also provides ample examples when the politics of regret took on exclusionary characteristics, that is, when it made unquestionable statements about the moral and historical truth and brought into question the legitimacy of other positions. What first comes to mind, the German law of 1985 that criminalised Holocaust denial, is not the best example because it might not convince those who believe that all forms of Holocaust denial are necessarily forms of hate speech and should thus be proscribed by the state not only because they are morally and historically false, but because they threaten violence.

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<sup>268</sup> Miklós Nyiszli, *Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account* (London: Penguin, 2012).

<sup>269</sup> Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (London: Abacus, 1989).

<sup>270</sup> Gideon Greif and Andreas Kilian, "Significance, Responsibility, Challenge: Interviewing the Sonderkommando Survivors," *International Journal on the Audio-Visual Testimony* 9 (2003): 79.

<sup>271</sup> Gideon Greif, "Between Sanity and Insanity: Spheres of Everyday Life in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Sonderkommando," in *Gray Zones: Ambiguity and Compromise in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*, ed. Jonathan Petropoulos and John K. Roth (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 37–60; Gideon Greif, *We Wept Without Tears: Testimonies of the Jewish Sonderkommando from Auschwitz* (London: Yale University Press, 2005).

There are more convincing examples for exclusionary regret because at certain points in German history, one did not have to go near as far as Holocaust denial to be shunned and ostracised. In the *Historikerstreit*, regarding the Holocaust as a unique evil was presented by the left-wing intellectuals as the only morally and historically right reading of the past and deviating from this was a “temptation which no German would ever again have the right to indulge.”<sup>272</sup> The right-wing intellectuals were routinely labelled Nazi apologists and anti-Semites because the relativization of German responsibility was claimed to automatically follow from their attempts at contextualisation. Of course, they did make some dubious historical statements and the question of uniqueness-historicization can be debated endlessly, but their real crime was that they dared to challenge the unquestionable status of a particular reading of the Holocaust. Some paid for the alleged transgression of this sacred myth with much more than the right-wing intellectuals of the *Historikerstreit*. Philipp Jenninger was forced to resign from his position as the President of the Bundestag in 1988 after a badly delivered but ultimately harmless speech in which he attempted to explain the enthusiasm of ordinary Germans for National Socialist ideology in the 1930s.

It must be noted that there are a number of more recent events which suggest that the exclusionary character of the official Holocaust narrative in Germany is not as strong as it used to be at its zenith in the mid-1980s. An important development since the early 2000s is that the narratives that emphasise German civilians’ own suffering during the war have been gradually attracting more and more attention, such as the destructive Allied bombing of German cities, the mass rape of German women by the soldiers of the Red Army after the liberation/occupation of Berlin, and the expulsion of millions of Germans from Eastern European countries after the war.<sup>273</sup> This “political tendency in Germany to move from the self-perception of a nation of perpetrators to that of a nation of victims”<sup>274</sup> has caused alarm among the more uncompromising supporters of the politics of regret as they believe that paying too much attention to such victimhood narratives relativizes German responsibility, crowds out regretful narratives and ultimately opens the way for conventional nationalist sentiments. Nevertheless, the opposition to the rise of these myths of victimhood have been far less strong and exclusionist than that in the *Historikerstreit*. The fact that influential public figures in Germany can subscribe to hitherto unacceptable positions in the uniqueness-comparability debate without triggering a political outrage also suggests that the politics of regret has lost much of its exclusionary traits. Joachim Gauck, the current federal president, contributed a chapter to the German edition of *The Black Book of Communism* and signed

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<sup>272</sup> Judt, *Postwar*, 812.

<sup>273</sup> Bell, “Agonistic Democracy and the Politics of Memory,” 160–161.

<sup>274</sup> Troebst, “Halecki Revisited,” 61.



the Prague Declaration which states that “there are substantial similarities between Nazism and Communism in terms of their horrific and appalling character and their crimes against humanity,” and that Europe should “recognize Communism and Nazism as a common legacy.”<sup>275</sup> Or former president of the European Parliament Hans-Gert Pöttering, for instance, could say that “both totalitarian systems are comparable and terrible”<sup>276</sup> without any political consequences. Such statements were unthinkable thirty years ago which shows that the exclusionary tendencies of political regret in Germany are significantly less pronounced.

To conclude, in this section I supported my argument about the similarities between regretful and traditional myths which goes against the received wisdom that they are diametrically opposed to each other. By showing that the different qualities of a narrative (its morality, accuracy, exclusionism and politicalness) are independent from each other, I demonstrated that the self-flagellatory or self-congratulatory tone of a myth does not determine its historical accuracy or its exclusionary tendencies. I agree that actual public representations of the past do seem to follow a pattern according to which regretful myths are more accurate and less exclusionary than traditional myths. Even if this is the case, the simplistic dichotomy between “good” politics of regret and “bad” traditional myths has all too often exculpated the former from criticism and has fuelled the present antagonism between the advocates of the two types of narrative. I argue that we should primarily criticise myths for their inaccuracy and exclusionism, not because of their tone. The themes of myths about regret, glory, heroism and victimhood might be liked or not, but what is much more problematic and potentially destructive is their possible exclusionary character because this is the source of the prevailing antagonistic relationships. The role of critical and sentimental education is thus to challenge the possible exclusionary traits of both types of narrative, while dialogue is meant to bring the two opposing camps into a more peaceful, agonistic relationship with each other. In the following chapters, I examine the nature of this antagonism at the European level and I argue for trying to overcome it by the development of a pluralist European mythscape.

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<sup>275</sup> “Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism,” June 3, 2008.

<sup>276</sup> Baltic News Service, “Baltic States Opened Western Europe’s Eyes on Soviet Union Totalitarianism,” April 28, 2009, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110722150204/http://www.euro.lt/en/news/lithuanias-membership-in-the-eu/news/5537/?print=1>.



# PART II

## Pluralist European Mythscape

People are always shouting that they want to create a better future. It's not true. The future is an apathetic void of no interest to anyone. The past is full of life, eager to irritate us, tempt us to destroy or repaint it. The only reason people want to be masters of the future is to change the past.

Milan Kundera

*The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1979)

When you were young, you thought of the future,  
it meant all your dreams come true.  
But since then, you've been schooled;  
since then, you've been fooled.  
And however I sing it, the truth will stay bitter  
'cause the future was sold to the highest bidder.

András Upor

*Let the Song Work on You* (2015)

The future ain't what it used to be.

Yogi Berra



# 5

## Disciplinary Approaches to the Idea of European Memory

In this chapter, I present the most prominent academic conceptualisations of European memory, demonstrate their shortcomings and conclude that we should think about the idea in a different way. In the first section, I critically evaluate the current state of the academic debate about the concept of European memory. I distinguish between four mainstream conceptions: the Eurosceptic-nationalist, the Europeanist-functionalist, the thick-cultural, and the thin-political. The former two camps agree that there is no need for symbolic foundations for the European integration project but disagree about the reasons; the latter two groups agree that Europe does require symbolic underpinnings but disagree about the form that these should take. Contrary to these openly engaged scholarly positions, a fifth approach refrains from making normative statements about what European memory should or should not be, and it takes a detached observer view with respect to the development of European transnational memory practices. After questioning each position in turn, I conclude that the two most prominent previous conceptualisations of European memory are characterised by problem-solving thinking and teleological assumptions and I argue for a more critical attitude towards the concept. In the second section, I explore the different strategies that academics employed to make sense of the European memory wars and the role that they played in its development. I differentiate between two diametrically opposed views, the “civilising Westerner” and the “Eastern freedom fighter,” and demonstrate their inadequacies. Finally, I consider previous scholarly attempts to find a compromise between these opposing camps, show why these attempts might not succeed in bridging this gap, and suggest a new, pluralist approach that has a better chance of overcoming this antagonism.

Importantly, my objective here is to review and critically reflect on the scholarly discussion about the concept of European memory. I am not concerned with the vast literature on European identity, the symbolic legitimisation of the idea of Europe and the mythical underpinnings of the European integration process. As I have explained in the Introduction, I focus narrowly on the concept of European memory and I am not interested in every social

phenomenon that is remotely connected to the representation of European history. While I expressed a preference in Chapter 2 for the term “myth” over “collective memory” to denote the public representations of identity-constitutive narratives, this terminology is a minority position in the literature. In fact, including phrases like “European myth” in the scope of my analysis would not enrich our understanding of the conceptualisations of European memory because the concept of myth is used in a variety of different and confusing ways. Probably the worst offender in this respect is the practice of using myth and symbol interchangeably, of treating the “mythical and symbolic underpinnings of the European integration process”<sup>277</sup> together. This conceptual confusion plagued the special issue of the leading academic journal in European integration studies whose authors tended to identify any type of symbolic underpinning as mythical.<sup>278</sup> This is not to say that there is or should be one right definition of symbol and myth. However, the works in this special issue were highly internally inconsistent as they relied on two different understandings of mythology, namely those of Roland Barthes and Duncan Bell (for the difference between the two, see Chapter 2). A narrow interest in the concept of European memory is therefore justified.

### Scholarly Approaches to the Idea of European Memory

The use of the term “European memory” with a transnational connotation became noticeable in academia in the early 1990s. The articles of Jacques Le Goff and Gérard Namer written in French were among the earliest scholarly discussions that contemplated the possibility and the desirability of a European collective memory that can underpin the European integration process.<sup>279</sup> The beginning of a systematic debate about the concept can be dated to the early 2000s when the politics of regret and the commemoration of the Holocaust became more prevalent and institutionally organised.

With respect to the current state of the literature, I follow Bottici and Challand in distinguishing between four main scholarly positions with respect to the idea of European

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<sup>277</sup> Bottici and Challand, *Imagining Europe*, 89.

<sup>278</sup> Special issue on “Political Myth, Mythology and the European Union” of the *Journal of Common Market Studies* 48, no. 1 (2010): 1–19; Hannes Hansen-Magnusson and Antje Wiener, “Studying Contemporary Constitutionalism: Memory, Myth and Horizon,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 48, no. 1 (2010): 21–44; Stijn Smismans, “The European Union’s Fundamental Rights Myth,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 48, no. 1 (2010): 45–66; Ian Manners, “Global Europa: Mythology of the European Union in World Politics,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 48, no. 1 (2010): 67–87; Erik Jones, “The Economic Mythology of European Integration,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 48, no. 1 (2010): 89–109; Pinar Akman and Hussein Kassim, “Myths and Myth-Making in the European Union: The Institutionalization and Interpretation of EU Competition Policy,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 48, no. 1 (2010): 111–32; Andrea Lenschow and Carina Sprungk, “The Myth of a Green Europe,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 48, no. 1 (2010): 133–54; Heather Macrae, “The EU as a Gender Equal Polity: Myths and Realities,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 48, no. 1 (2010): 155–74.

<sup>279</sup> Jacques Le Goff, “Le temps national retrouvé,” *Le Monde*, May 2, 1993; Gérard Namer, “Une mémoire collective européenne est-elle possible?,” *Revue suisse de sociologie* 19, no. 1 (1993): 25–32.

memory.<sup>280</sup> The Eurosceptic-nationalist camp tends to rely on an instrumentalist conception according to which European political elites employ various historical narratives to legitimate existing power arrangements, and criticises the “artificiality” of such legitimating stories as opposed to the alleged “authenticity” of national memories. Even some who are generally in favour of European integration question the need for these narratives by denying that there is a “symbolic deficit” problem in the first place. They argue that, unlike nation states, the EU is a purely “performance-based” polity; deriving its legitimacy from the necessity and the efficiency of its work, it does not require symbolic bases.<sup>281</sup> Most Europeanists, however, support the idea of European memory but disagree about what it should mean. The majority of Euroenthusiasts have a thick, cultural conception of European memory and envisage a common core narrative or a reasonably harmonised set of narratives that can be the basis of self-identification with Europe. In order to achieve this, they attempt to reconcile differences between conflicting (mostly national) memories and understandings of history in Europe.<sup>282</sup> Conversely, the thin, political understanding of the concept posits that the identity that European memory underpins can only be a purely political identity supported by a common political culture. The proponents of this European constitutional patriotism call for the Europe-wide harmonisation not of identity-constitutive historical narratives, but of the ethical values and social practices with which national communities can “come to terms with” and “work through their past.”<sup>283</sup> Finally, I would complement the typology of Bottici and Challand by drawing attention to a fifth position (or non-position) with respect to the idea of European memory, notably the approach that is taken by academics who strive not to engage with the normative questions raised by the idea of European memory. They

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<sup>280</sup> Bottici and Challand, *Imagining Europe*.

<sup>281</sup> Andrew Moravcsik, *The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Fritz Scharpf, *Governing in Europe: Effective and Democratic?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>282</sup> Aleida Assmann, “Europe: A Community of Memory? Twentieth Annual Lecture of the GHI,” *GHI Bulletin* 40 (2007): 11–25; Muriel Blaive, Christian Gerbel, and Thomas Lindenberger, eds., *Clashes in European Memory: The Case of Communist Repression and the Holocaust* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2011); Furio Cerutti and Enno Rudolph, *A Soul for Europe: Vol. 1 A Reader* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2001); Furio Cerutti and Enno Rudolph, *A Soul for Europe: Vol. 2 An Essay Collection* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2001); Droit, “Le Goulag contre la Shoah”; Konrad Hugo Jarausch, Thomas Lindenberger, and Annelie Ramsbrock, eds., *Conflicted Memories: Europeanizing Contemporary Histories* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007); Claus Leggewie, “Equally Criminal? Totalitarian Experience and European Memory,” *Eurozine*, 2006, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2006-06-01-leggewie-en.html>; Claus Leggewie, “Seven Circles of European Memory,” *Eurozine*, 2010, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2010-12-20-leggewie-en.html>; Claus Leggewie and Anne-Katrin Lang, *Der Kampf Um Die Europäische Erinnerung* (München: C. H. Beck, 2011); Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth, eds., *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010); Timothy Snyder, “Balancing the Books,” *Eurozine*, 2005, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2005-05-03-snyder-en.html>.

<sup>283</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); Jürgen Habermas, *Europe: The Faltering Project* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009); Müller, *Constitutional Patriotism*; Müller, “On ‘European Memory’”; Sierp, *History, Memory, and Trans-European Identity*.

avowedly “abandon all political-normative perspectives”<sup>284</sup> and opt for the supposedly detached observation of the related political developments. Their aim is to describe and/or explain the relevant social processes without making value judgements about their desirability or undesirability.

Bottici and Challand were dissatisfied with all these approaches. They criticised Eurosceptics on the grounds that the artificiality-authenticity distinction is untenable. Based on the works of Hobsbawm and Benedict Anderson,<sup>285</sup> they argued that national memories are as “invented” or “imagined” as narratives legitimating European integration. Bottici and Challand also distanced themselves from those who argued that the EU can and should be solely based on output-legitimacy. On the one hand, they questioned the assumption that the EU is highly efficient and truly irreplaceable in the attempts to deal with the effects of globalisation that individual nation states cannot address; on the other hand, they claimed that as every social action takes place within a framework of meaning, a polity without symbolic underpinnings is inconceivable. Furthermore, they questioned the practical feasibility of the thick conception of European memory and highlighted that symbolic integration is a multi-faceted process of which mythical integration is only one possible (and not necessarily the most effective) form. Finally, Bottici and Challand rejected the notion that cultural and political identities can be separated in the way that proponents of the thick conception believed.

I agree with Bottici and Challand that the five mainstream scholarly approaches to European memory are all unsatisfactory, but I also find their criticism wanting in certain respects. In the following, I aim to reinforce and refine their critique. Their rejection of Eurosceptic arguments is warranted, but it must be more nuanced and should incorporate more recent developments in the field of nationalism studies in order to be convincing. Even though the works of Hobsbawm and Anderson were indeed revolutionary within nationalism studies in the 1980s, there were significant differences between these two thinkers (most notably, with respect to the matter of invention and imagination of national traditions) and they have not convinced everyone within nationalism studies about the origin of nations. Modernists and postmodernists, relying on Hobsbawm’s and Anderson’s seminal works, respectively, view nations as the products of

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<sup>284</sup> Sarah Gensburger and Marie-Claire Lavabre, “D’une « mémoire » européenne à l’eupéanisation de la « mémoire »,” *Politique européenne*, no. 37 (2012): 11. Translated by the author. See also Oriane Calligaro and François Foret, “La mémoire européenne en action. Acteurs, enjeux et modalités de la mobilisation du passé comme ressource politique pour l’Union Européenne,” *Politique européenne*, no. 37 (2012): 18–43; Camille Mazé, “Des usages politiques du musée à l’échelle européenne,” *Politique européenne* 37, no. 2 (2012): 72–100.

<sup>285</sup> Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).



modernity whereas ethno-symbolists, based on Anthony Smith and John Hutchinson,<sup>286</sup> believe that they are rooted in cultural and ethnic ties that predate modernity. The leading schools agree, however, that nationalism as an ideology and national identity are relatively recent phenomena, emerging in the late eighteenth century, and that political elites had an important role in disseminating and propagating them. The majority opinion in nationalism studies thus suggests that European identity-constitutive historical narratives are no more or less artificial than those underlying national identities. This observation, however, should not imply that it is natural and acceptable for public institutions to promote historical narratives that legitimate them. It only means that centrally projected historical narratives are not more artificial and/or problematic at the European level than at the level of nation states.

The criticism that Bottici and Challand mounted against European constitutional patriotism, that it posits an unrealistic separation between political and cultural identity, is quite weak especially in the light of the fact that they themselves argued for an (albeit mostly analytical) separation between political and cultural myths. There are significant problems with the thin conception of European memory, but we need a more elaborate critique if we are to learn from its failures. In the following paragraphs, I will challenge this position on three fronts: the underlying framework of Habermasian communicative action, the resulting idea of European and cosmopolitan constitutional patriotism, and Müller's argument about a series of national politics of regret throughout Europe. Without the intention to give a comprehensive critique of Habermasian communicative action and constitutional patriotism, I will first outline my theoretical objections to these pillars of the thin conception of European memory and then expand on the practical issues with them.

On the level of theory, the two main reasons for which I criticised the idea of communicative reason in the previous chapter were its reliance on an idealised speech situation where perfectly rational discussion can take place and for its teleological orientation towards consensus. On the one hand, this relies on the highly abstract notion of “an ideal-typical moral subject disembodied from real social relations,”<sup>287</sup> unburdened with material interests and emotions. On the other hand, it assumes that rational consensus is always possible. This is a very bold claim which is at odds with the observation made in the previous chapter that diametrically

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<sup>286</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988); John Hutchinson, *Nations as Zones of Conflict* (London: SAGE, 2005).

<sup>287</sup> John Michael Roberts, “Discourse or Dialogue? Habermas, the Bakhtin Circle, and the Question of Concrete Utterances,” *Theory and Society* 41, no. 4 (2012): 397.

opposed views are not necessarily the products of different subjective capacities of rationality, and there is no reason to believe that these differences can be dissolved by communicative reason.

For Habermas, the communicative process is an important source of political identity. Constitutional patriotism is supposed to be a post-national or post-conventional identity which binds citizens together based on their shared loyalty to the constitution which stands for the rules and principles of the deliberative procedure (such as liberal democracy) and the shared universal norms and values (such as human rights). Citizens are thus bound together on the basis of a common political culture, a constitutional culture that can effectively be universal and specific at the same time as it “mediates between universal norms and particular contexts.”<sup>288</sup> This type of self-identification is supposed to stand in contrast to conventional, national identities which rely on pre-political ties such as ethnicity. The objection that such a separation between political and cultural identity is unrealistic is a valid concern; the problem is that it solely relies on the criterion of feasibility but, as Raymond Geuss argued, opinions about what is realistically possible always vary from one historical context to another and from one social agent to another.<sup>289</sup> Following Margaret Canovan,<sup>290</sup> I argue that it is theoretically problematic to separate the pre-political ties of birth from the political ties between citizens because it plays down the importance of the familial inheritance of citizenship. “To the vast majority of citizens, even the most Habermasian polity is ‘ours’ because it was our parents’ before us.”<sup>291</sup> Canovan took the case of European citizenship which she called the *reductio ad absurdum* of constitutional patriotism. European citizenship is currently obtained automatically with the acquisition of citizenship in one of the EU member states. For the overwhelming majority, this is obtained by birth and ultimately inherited from the parents. If, however, pre-political ties did not matter and European citizenship was supposed to indicate allegiance to a (hypothetical) European constitution, Canovan argued that being born into a family of European citizens should not imply a “privileged claim on European citizenship.”<sup>292</sup> If ties of birth and blood were completely irrelevant, the decision about who is entitled to European citizenship should be made by means such as competitive examinations between applicants from all over the world to determine who is the most cognizant of and the most loyal to the constitution. Therefore, the problem with constitutional patriotism is that it presents a false dichotomy. “Either we insist on a non-national, patriotic polity to which birthright is irrelevant, or we open the door

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<sup>288</sup> Müller, *Constitutional Patriotism*, 59.

<sup>289</sup> Raymond Geuss, *A World without Why* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

<sup>290</sup> Margaret Canovan, “Patriotism Is Not Enough,” *British Journal of Political Science* 30, no. 3 (2000): 413–32.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 426.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*

to a national polity understood in racist terms... The fact is that any polity, however liberal its ethos, is and must be an inheritance passed from generation to generation.”<sup>293</sup>

Müller based his thin conception of European memory on these two Habermasian ideas of communicative action and constitutional patriotism. For him, European memory did not mean the Europeanisation of “the contents of different collective memories,” but he envisaged the “Europeanisation of moral-political attitudes and practices in dealing with profoundly different pasts.”<sup>294</sup> Müller thought that each European nation should self-critically work through its own past as Germany has done and that all these national *Vergangenheitsbewältigungen* would inevitably lead to “a series of apparently national instantiations of the politics of regret.”<sup>295</sup> The relevant ethical framework with respect to the public representation of past events that should be adopted throughout Europe is thus a duty-based one. Similarly to the separation between political and cultural identity, my main concern with a Europe-wide politics of regret is not so much that it is practically unfeasible, but that it would be normatively undesirable. I have explained in the previous chapter that a narrative’s honesty about its mythical status is much more morally significant than its (regretful or boastful) tone; in and of itself, the politics of regret is not taken to be morally superior to other types of myth. But let us assume that the Europe-wide instantiations of the politics of regret do not make historical truth claims. Even then, the question would remain what the point of national deliberative processes is if their outcome is already prescribed to be consensus about a regretful narrative. Surely, a decision that was made collectively enjoys more democratic legitimacy than one imposed from above. It is nevertheless difficult to understand why the end point of deliberation between rational citizens is fixed to be an agreement on a particular type of narrative.

On the practical level, the most common objection raised against Habermas’s call for the “development of a European-wide political public sphere”<sup>296</sup> is that Europe does not have the common language which would be a prerequisite for meaningful transnational debate among equal citizens. Habermas thought that, given the political will, every practical problem that stands in the way of a European public sphere can in principle be tackled. “Even the requirement of a common language—English as a second first language—ought not be an insurmountable obstacle with the existing level of formal schooling.”<sup>297</sup> It is understandable why Habermas promoted English as a

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 427.

<sup>294</sup> Müller, “On ‘European Memory,’” 27.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Habermas, *Europe*, 87.

<sup>297</sup> Jürgen Habermas, “Remarks on Dieter Grimm’s ‘Does Europe Need a Constitution?,’” *European Law Journal* 1, no. 3 (1995): 307.

“second first language” and not as a second language; if it was only a second language, the European public sphere would not be a communication among equals because those whose mother tongue is English would have a head start in the debate. I maintain that the idea that English, or any other language for that matter, can become a second language for the masses is possible, albeit improbable, but it cannot become a “second first language” as Habermas claimed. It is perfectly possible to have two first languages, of course, but this requires a lot more than “formal education.” For any language to become a second mother tongue, a child needs to receive almost as many impulses in this second mother tongue as in his/her first mother tongue from a very early age. This is why people who have successfully acquired two first languages either have parents whose mother tongues are different from each other and/or were brought up in a linguistic environment that was different from the mother tongues of their parents. At the moment, these people only amount to a fraction of the European population and it is difficult to see how their share can drastically change.

A potentially much more serious practical concern with the idea of constitutional patriotism, however, is that the actual states which are presented as models approximating this ideal might be said to do so because of a series of historically contingent events and, in many ways, they do not even fulfil the basic criteria of a constitutional patriotic polity. Germany is often cited to be a post-national or even anti-national state where attachment to the Basic Law has largely replaced conventional identities. Indeed, the idea of constitutional patriotism arose in the very particular historical situation of West Germany; the term *Verfassungspatriotismus* was coined by Dolf Sternberger in 1979, on the thirtieth birthday of the Federal Republic, and was later borrowed and modified by Habermas.

Habermas’s apparently abstract and universalizable “constitutional patriotism” is traceable to a very specific situation and a particular national history, raising questions about its wider relevance... the post-war Federal Republic of Germany ... was a truncated state, including only part of the nation, with a set of liberal democratic institutions imposed from without and designed to run counter to the political traditions predominant in Germany for the previous century. Furthermore, the Nazi past made the whole topic of loyalty (patriotic or nationalist) uniquely sensitive.<sup>298</sup>

Canovan argued that not only is the German case historically unique, but it is not even a very good example of a polity built on constitutional patriotic loyalties. She remarked that “behind the handful of constitutional patriots who talked about the nature of their loyalty were a great many German nationalists who did not. When the opportunity for unification arrived the political

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<sup>298</sup> Canovan, “Patriotism Is Not Enough,” 417.

significance of that tacit identity became apparent.”<sup>299</sup> Even though the reunification did not take place under the aegis of traditional German nationalism, the fact that the vast majority of West Germans believed to have a special responsibility towards East Germans but not to the citizens of other states showed above all the endurance of pre-political ties in Germany. Canovan also demonstrated that in the other two countries cited to be good approximations of constitutional patriotism, Switzerland and the US, the pre-political ties of birth and blood remain similarly important.

Given the ambition of Habermas to render a historically unique and contingent political cultural arrangement universal, it is easy to understand Jan-Werner Müller’s ambition to “export” a unique German experience, the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, to all of Europe. The problem, however, is not only this self-avowed ambition to realise “Thomas Mann’s nightmare—a German Europe, rather than a European Germany.”<sup>300</sup> While Germany might indeed be a model of coming to terms with the past, as my brief overview of the history of the commemoration of the Holocaust in the previous chapter showed, even there the dominance of the politics of regret is not absolute. There is and has been no consensus on how the Holocaust should be remembered. In the last decade, one might even say that the relative importance of the politics of regret has decreased in the face of the rise of traditional stories of own victimhood. Müller also realised that the (supposed) German constitutional patriotism is characterised by a strong emphasis on memory and militancy. “Memory here refers primarily to a self-critical remembering of the Holocaust and the Nazi past; militancy, on the other hand, has been shown toward the enemies of democracy, mostly through judicial means such as banning political parties and restricting free speech.”<sup>301</sup> In practice, the German public sphere, if it can be said to exist, is thus underpinned by a foundation myth, however post-conventional it might be, and a militant attitude towards the transgressors of this myth in particular and the radically different in general. Müller recognised that these two elements might be said to undermine the avowedly “liberal” and “progressive” nature of the whole constitutional patriotic enterprise, but he thought that these are specific to the German case and are not necessary conditions for constitutional patriotism. While admitting that there are “important conceptual links between the morality of constitutional patriotism, militancy, and memory,”<sup>302</sup> Müller argued for not putting “too much stress on memory and militancy as aspects of constitutional patriotism, as both have an illiberal side.”<sup>303</sup> He mentioned, but did not take a clear position with respect to, the

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 423.

<sup>300</sup> Müller, *Constitutional Patriotism*, 6.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 11.

most prominent example of this exclusionary memory-militancy logic, the German legislation of 1985 that made Holocaust denial punishable by imprisonment. The identity-constitutive and sacred status of the Holocaust was reaffirmed as the “relevant insult here was not just seen as being directed against the immediate victims (and possibly their descendants)—it was also an offense to the self-understanding of the German polity.”<sup>304</sup> Holocaust denial is indeed a deeply troubling phenomenon to which everyone in their right mind should object to; however, reaffirming the status of a historical narrative as an unquestionable truth and restricting dissenting voices by legal means seem to be actions that are more characteristic of traditional nationalists than tolerant citizens with post-conventional identities.

Finally, Müller’s account is also characterised by a nation-centric thinking that is in tension (if not in direct contradiction) with his claim that the “process of mutual opening and civilised confrontation of collective memories ... should not unfold simply along national lines.”<sup>305</sup> He spoke about how a “national collective *can* take responsibility for its past” and about how it cannot “argue about *other* nations’ pasts”<sup>306</sup> as if nations were coherent and organic wholes.

Proponents of the thick conception of European memory similarly tend to succumb to the simplicity of nation-centrism when they talk about conflicting national historical experiences and the reconciliation of national collective memories as if these were monolithic “things” out there. These scholarly works tend to be mostly historical accounts of what a consensual European memory could be and how this might be achieved in practice. As such, they are built upon the premise that the addition of ever more historical detail will magically solve difficult conceptual dilemmas and diametrically opposed interpretations of the past. They pay little attention to the host of conceptual and normative issues that the idea of European memory (or that of collective memory for that matter) involves and hope to “narrate their way out of” theoretical dilemmas. In their search for what Feindt et al. called an inventory of “homogeneous European *lieux de mémoire*,”<sup>307</sup> they are also characterised by strong nation-centrism. It must be noted that most thinkers do pay lip service to the need to transcend the fixation on national memories. Georges Mink, for instance, noted the “stalemate that paradigms that aim to explain *national* situations end up in,”<sup>308</sup> but this did not prevent him from talking about the “Eastern European memory”<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>305</sup> Müller, “On ‘European Memory,’” 26.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 27. Italics in the original.

<sup>307</sup> Feindt et al., “Entangled Memory,” 38.

<sup>308</sup> Georges Mink, “Geopolitics, Reconciliation and Memory Games: For a New Social Memory Explanatory Paradigm,” in *Clashes in European Memory: The Case of Communist Repression and the Holocaust*, ed. Muriel Blaive, Christian Gerbel, and Thomas Lindenberger (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2011), 256. Italics in the original.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 260.

which is an even more totalising concept than national memory. Or as a critique of the seminal *A European Memory?* noted, despite the declared transnational perspective of the edited volume, “transnational here still tends to result in a comparison of national cases.”<sup>310</sup>

The fixation on national communities and memories is much more than a mere analytical problem. If the search for an inventory of European landscapes of memory only considers the dominant myths from each national mythscape, surely the resulting consensual narrative can only possibly be an amalgam of these dominant myths and it would necessarily disregard the host of subaltern myths that are already in a disadvantaged situation. Therefore, with respect to the thick, cultural conception of European memory, my main objection is again not so much that a homogenised European memory would be unfeasible, as Bottici and Challand claimed, but that it would be highly undesirable because the search for it is bound to reinforce and further naturalise already powerful national narratives.

Even if academic works in this vein did give serious consideration to the subaltern, it would still be based on a teleological thinking whose ultimate aim is the reaching of consensus and the dissolution of memory differences. In fact, both Europeanist scholarly conceptions of European memory are underpinned by this highly “teleological frame geared toward ending mnemonic conflicts.”<sup>311</sup> On the one hand, thick conceptions of European memory aim to arrive at a consensual narrative or set of narratives which all European nations come to share; on the other hand, thin conceptions advocate a Habermasian communicative action within national frameworks where the outcome is invariably a consensus on regretful narratives. Even if some accounts of European memory take conflicts between different interpretations of the past seriously, like that of Claus Leggewie and Anne-Katrin Lang,<sup>312</sup> these differences are presented as something to be overcome by “an increased Europeanization of memory.” However, as Feindt et al. noted, this “teleological approach risks denying the inherent polyphony of memory.”<sup>313</sup>

Additionally, both conceptions are guilty of the “unreflected instrumentalization of European Memory.”<sup>314</sup> They both see European memory as a means to strengthen the foundations of a European identity, although they differ with respect to the content of this identity. The thick conception envisages a shared cultural identity, whereas the thin conception calls for a purely political identity based on a common political culture. Whatever the nature of the identity

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<sup>310</sup> Susan Ingram, “A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance,” *The European Legacy* 20, no. 6 (2015): 674.

<sup>311</sup> Feindt et al., “Entangled Memory,” 38.

<sup>312</sup> Leggewie and Lang, *Der Kampf Um Die Europäische Erinnerung*.

<sup>313</sup> Feindt et al., “Entangled Memory,” 37–38.

<sup>314</sup> Feindt et al., *Europäische Erinnerung Als Verflochtene Erinnerung*.

embedded in these conceptions is, by aiming to reinforce the legitimacy of European institutions, they both pursue a problem-solving logic. They take the importance of solving the “legitimacy problem” of the EU and the “problem of European memory” as given and set out to solve them without adequate self-reflection about whether legitimating the EU (or any other political authority for that matter) should be their task as academics. Even if there is some consideration given to this, it is not addressed convincingly. Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth, for instance, explicitly sought to avoid repeating the mistake of nineteenth-century historians whose teleological stories of national glory effectively rendered the nation-state a social reality; they thought that “in the twenty-first century the long-term legitimacy of European unification requires a more critical historical understanding—one that acknowledges the conflicts, contentions, complexity and ambiguity of Europe’s past and thereby recognizes the fragility of its future.”<sup>315</sup> They did not intend to replace stories of national glory with stories of regret, “to replace self-satisfaction with self-flagellation,” but to argue for “a better balance between opposing sides in the outlines of the European past.”<sup>316</sup> By contrast, Müller argued for the instantiations of the politics of regret within nations as he saw “no point in replacing self-congratulatory national histories with what paradoxically could be called self-congratulatory, self-critical supranational histories.” He thus argued for the replacement of traditional national narratives with regretful national ones while condemning “Euro-nation building through negative memory building.”<sup>317</sup> Similarly, Konrad Jarausch claimed that “scholars must above all avoid ... propagandising for a nation state—even on a larger European scale” and then quickly opted for political regret, for “a more self-critical view of the past that freely admits a nation’s crimes against their own citizens and also against their neighbours.”<sup>318</sup> These arguments clearly miss the point. What should be at stake here is not whether academics should promote self-congratulatory histories, self-critical histories or a “better balance” between the two. The question should be whether scholars should promote narratives that legitimate political institutions in the first place (and whether political institutions should project self-legitimizing stories). The mistake of nineteenth-century nationalist historians was not that they propagated stories of national glory instead of stories of regret, but that they supplied nation-states with self-legitimizing historical narratives. In the previous chapter, I argued that the politics of regret is also a form of self-legitimation and often relies on the same exclusionary logic

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<sup>315</sup> Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth, “Introduction,” in *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*, ed. Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 1.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>317</sup> Müller, “On ‘European Memory,’” 36.

<sup>318</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch, “Nightmares or Daydreams? A Postscript on the Europeanisation of Memories,” in *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*, ed. Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 317–319.



as traditional myths. For this reason, if academics are not to “turn into what Henry Rousso once called ‘agitators of memory,’”<sup>319</sup> as Müller asserted, they should refrain from naturalising mythical representations of the past and from promoting any type of mythistory, be it self-congratulatory or self-flagellatory. Academia, however, has been all too ready to give a hand to national and European political authorities in the instrumentalization of memory in general (of both the regretful and the traditional type), and of European memory in particular.

Publications on national *lieux de mémoire* as well as state-sponsored research agendas charged with *Aufarbeitung* of the past emphasize the strength and primordial role of political entities. Such a relationship is to some degree duplicated at the European level with scholars investigating the existence of European memory, sometimes supported by EU funds.<sup>320</sup>

Dissatisfied by teleological frameworks, by the mainstream academic preoccupation with an inventory of “homogeneous European *lieux de mémoire*,”<sup>321</sup> and by the “unreflected instrumentalization of European Memory,” Feindt et al. called for a different scholarly approach to the concept. They advocated a research agenda “concentrating on actors and their strategies that contributed to the emergence of European interpretations ... investigating an actor’s struggle to establish the dominant interpretation by marking other interpretations as inappropriate, illegitimate, or simply wrong.”<sup>322</sup> I agree that the focus of scholarly attention should be the actors, their interpretations of European memory and the antagonistic relationships between them; however, I argue that the goal should not simply be to “concentrate” on and “investigate” these dynamics, but to challenge them and, at the same time, to provide a framework within which the antagonism could be overcome. I thus argue that we need to think more critically about the idea of European memory and to question the taken-for-granted assumptions that have hitherto characterised both academic and non-academic approaches to the concept. In the next two chapters, I will follow this logic and will critically engage with the conceptions of European memory that are prevalent in European institutions.

Importantly, this does not mean the rejection of transnational European co-operation with respect to the public representation of past events. On the contrary, such co-operation is sorely needed. I even agree with Müller that the aim of this co-operation should not be a Europeanisation of “the contents of different collective memories, but rather a Europeanisation of moral-political attitudes and practices in dealing with profoundly different pasts.”<sup>323</sup> Where I

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<sup>319</sup> Müller, “On ‘European Memory,’” 26.

<sup>320</sup> Feindt et al., “Entangled Memory,” 38.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> Müller, “On ‘European Memory,’” 27.

differ from Müller sharply is what these shared attitudes and practices should be. As opposed to Müller who based his argument on Habermasian communicative action, I rely on Bakhtin's concept of dialogue. In the framework that I propose the emphasis is on the process of dialogue, not on the teleological end-point of consensus; the focus is on overcoming antagonistic relationships, not on providing the foundations for a European constitutional patriotic identity. Therefore, the objective of transnational co-operation should not be a European memory or "a series of apparently national instantiations of the politics of regret,"<sup>324</sup> but the creation of a pluralist European mythscape which will be explained in detail in Chapter 8.

Finally, such a pluralist mythscape would also give a meaningful response to the Europeanist-functionalist objections to the idea of European memory. The standard answer given by Bottici and Challand is that every political entity needs legitimation in the form of attachment from its citizens, but this again only appeals to an argument about feasibility. The idea of a pluralist European mythscape makes a much more convincing case for the transnational European co-operation with respect to the public representation of past events. In this framework, the objective of co-operation is not the symbolic legitimation of the EU or the strengthening of European identity. Free from these concerns whose importance has been taken for granted for far too long in the debate about European memory, the rationale for transnational co-operation towards a pluralist mythscape is that it would be an effective way to overcome the antagonistic relationships which currently dominate the politics of the past in Europe.

### **The Role of Academics in the European Memory Wars**

The most prominent of these antagonisms is the debate known as the European memory wars. The memory wars are usually understood to stand for the allegedly different mnemonic cultures of Western Europe and the former communist member states, and for the resulting clashes on the European level. These clashes generally revolve around the historical interpretation and the evaluation of totalitarianisms (particularly Nazism and Stalinism) and their crimes (the Holocaust, the Gulag, the "Bloodlands").<sup>325</sup> For this reason, this debate, on the one hand, is an extension of the main issues discussed during the *Historikerstreit* to the European scene. The questions about the uniqueness, the comparability and the relativization of the crimes committed by totalitarian regimes figure prominently in the European memory wars. On the other hand, these abstract issues acquire new meanings once they are discussed in the context of the complex

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>325</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (London: Vintage, 2010).

European power dynamics. Many academics have been deeply involved in this debate and in this section I will critically explore their strategies and arguments.

The detailed empirical analysis of how the memory wars unfolded in European institutions will be conducted in the next chapter. In order to understand the scholarly debate about the issue, it is sufficient to keep the following, necessarily oversimplified, story in mind. By the mid-2000s, public interest in the Holocaust has reached unprecedented levels; the transnationalisation of its commemoration was enshrined by a decision of the UN General Assembly and many believed that it was set to become a foundational, “commonly shared European memory.”<sup>326</sup> This process did not simply coincide with the Eastern enlargement of the EU, but it was an integral part of the negotiations; as Tony Judt famously noted, the mature recognition and commemoration of the Holocaust was a sort of “European entry ticket” for the aspiring former communist states.<sup>327</sup> The reality of this informal “Copenhagen Remembrance Criterion”<sup>328</sup> is nicely demonstrated by how Slovakia was temporarily excluded from the EU enlargement negotiations in 1995 because it had adopted a textbook which could be read as an attempt to relativize the Holocaust.<sup>329</sup> However, shortly after gaining membership, many of the newly elected representatives of the Eastern European member states began to question the exclusive attention paid to the Holocaust. These mostly conservative MEPs initially sought the Europe-wide recognition and commemoration of the crimes of Stalinism (or even of communist regimes in general) and the suffering of Eastern European peoples. As this appeared too self-interested, they soon changed their rhetoric and began to emphasise the importance of a common European view towards all totalitarianisms. They were promptly accused by some other (mostly Western European left-wing) MEPs with the falsification of history and the relativization of the Holocaust. The ensuing European memory wars have basically been endless variations on this theme.

Many academics agree on what the sources of these clashes might be, but they are highly divided with respect to the ethical questions involved. The common starting point on which scholarly accounts of the European memory wars usually agree is that the Western and the Eastern sides of the continent (meaning the old member states and the former communist member states) had markedly different historical experiences of totalitarianism. Western Europe has only

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<sup>326</sup> Dan Diner, “Restitution and Memory: The Holocaust in European Political Cultures,” *New German Critique*, no. 90 (2003): 36.

<sup>327</sup> Judt, *Postwar*, 803.

<sup>328</sup> Droit, “Le Goulag contre la Shoah,” 104.

<sup>329</sup> Heike Karge, “Practices and Politics of Second World War Remembrance: (Trans-)National Perspectives from Eastern and Southern-Eastern Europe,” in *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*, ed. Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 139.

experienced right-wing dictatorships, while the East has experienced both right- and left-wing totalitarian regimes. Furthermore, whereas the free and democratic nations of the West had sufficient time to work through the dark parts of their pasts, or so the argument goes, the peoples of the East lived under the spell of historical myths imposed by communist regimes for a long time and only had the chance to confront uncomfortable events in their national pasts after the Cold War.

Apart from sharing this simple cover story, scholars are in disagreement over what the appropriate course of action is in this situation. The dominant position (at least in English-speaking academic circles) is in line with the mainstream duty-based approach and claims that Eastern Europe should grow up and should critically work through its past. Instead of taking pride in some glorious events of the past and lamenting the wrongs that have been done to them, they should follow the example of the West (and more particularly, that of Germany), should acknowledge their role in the Holocaust and in other crimes of the Second World War. More generally, they should pursue the politics of regret which is more humble and mature than their current myths of glory and victimhood. Aline Sierp, for instance, made it clear that what stands in the way of the development of a truly pan-European “culture of memory” is the insistence of post-communist countries on certain stories that emphasise their own victimhood. She contended that these stories resemble the myths that were prevalent after the war in Western European countries, that they are the *déjà-vu* of a phase that the West has already overcome.<sup>330</sup> This belief in the linear progress of national mnemonic strategies is shared by many other scholars in this “civilising Westerner” tradition, such as Aleida Assmann and Heidemarie Uhl.<sup>331</sup> Sierp finally supported the Müllerian thin conception of European memory whose aim is not to “commit all divergent memories and group experiences to one master narrative but to integrate them into a general binding framework guided by certain values and principles.”<sup>332</sup> By presenting the overcoming of traditional myths as a developmental stage that the West has already passed and the East is yet to face, Sierp arguably made use of the questionable assumption about linear and unidirectional progress that is common to duty-based accounts. A belief in the moral superiority of the politics of regret, and consequently in the existence of a moral and historical truth, is also evident in her account. In the previous chapter, I have already critically engaged with these assumptions and the resulting dichotomies between the mature and the immature, the rational and the irrational, the objective and the

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<sup>330</sup> Sierp, *History, Memory, and Trans-European Identity*, 135.

<sup>331</sup> Assmann, “Europe: A Community of Memory? Twentieth Annual Lecture of the GHI”; Heidemarie Uhl, “Conflicting Cultures of Memory in Europe: New Borders between East and West?,” *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 3, no. 3 (2009): 59–72.

<sup>332</sup> Sierp, *History, Memory, and Trans-European Identity*, 140.

emotional, the enlightened and the backward. Similarly to the practice of framing a social group which does not conform to a supposed moral imperative in these terms, labelling a country childish and uncivilised because it does not follow the example of a more “developed” one is in principle unjustified and in practice ineffective.

When I talked about duty-based accounts of memory in the previous chapter, I presented Olick who proposed an ethic of responsibility instead of the ethic of conviction that currently dominates moral philosophical discussions; the two approaches share the same goals and principles, but they differ on what the most practical means to achieve these are. Similarly, some students of the European memory wars agree with the principles of the regretful approach discussed above, but think that its aims could be better realised with other, less confrontational and more patient, means. While Bottici and Challand upheld that the East has a “moral obligation to acknowledge the suffering of others” and should eventually work through the dark side of its past, it should have the right to determine the timing of this memory work; the East, and any society for that matter, should have the right “to say ‘The Holocaust, or the Holodomor, is not the central worry for us *now*’ and assert its own priority in terms of collective memory.”<sup>333</sup> This typically ethic-of-responsibility thinking takes into account the historical conditions of possibility: the East ought to come to terms with its past, but it does not follow that it can quickly do this now. For Bottici and Challand, ought does not imply can. The East should be allowed to take its time in coming to terms with its past because pushing this too far now might have adverse consequences in the future. This argument still retains the paternalistic mental frame according to which the mature West needs to take care of its petulant child from the East; the difference from the previous approach is that instead of continuously scolding the child for its immature thinking and thus alienating the poor thing in the process, the sensible adult allows some childish behaviour for a time. While retaining this mental frame, Bottici and Challand gave another argument for the ethic of responsibility. The main reason for giving time to the East is not that a hasty transition to the politics of regret would not be practical, but that an externally imposed memory agenda would deprive these societies of their full autonomy. Bottici and Challand argued that repeatedly labelling Eastern European societies backward whenever they do not conform to Western expectations seriously interferes with their being fully autonomous. This is an important observation, but it raises the question why the East should only have the autonomy to determine the time when it comes to terms with the unsavoury parts of its past, and not whether it wants to confront these questions at all. The source of this apparent contradiction seems to be that Bottici and Challand

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<sup>333</sup> Bottici and Challand, *Imagining Europe*, 81.

wanted to uphold both the moral imperative of the politics of regret and the autonomy of Eastern European societies.

An academic who broke with the duty-based tradition completely and argued only for the right of the East to determine its own memories is Maria Mälksoo (at least in her early writings). Mälksoo approached the European memory wars with a postcolonial theoretical framework. She argued that the East should be considered a subaltern whose refusal to engage in the politics of regret that is practically imposed by the West is a form of resistance; this “resistance to the mnemopolitical authority of the West” is an important part in “Eastern Europe’s post-EU accession ideological decolonization.”<sup>334</sup> In the light of this, Mälksoo thought that Eastern European peoples’ “calls for equal remembrance of their pasts emerge as an essential part of their individuation process as European, of their becoming a European subject.”<sup>335</sup> What this means is that the stories that the East tells itself about its own past in relation to the West are crucial in constructing its own Europeanness. For instance, the “Western betrayal” narrative, which probably has the strongest support in Poland, states that the Western powers effectively betrayed the East immediately before and after the Second World War; in order to prevent confrontation with totalitarian regimes (first Nazi Germany, then the Soviet Union), the West made concessions to these predatory states and left the East on its own. This story is meant to explain (and to shift responsibility to the West for) how the East was derailed from its natural course of historical development and was robbed of its rightful place in Europe. “Since victimhood gives the right to complain, to protest and make demands, Western Europe is placed in the uncomfortable position of owing a debt to Eastern Europe.”<sup>336</sup> From this perspective, the accessions to the NATO and to the EU are seen as historical justice, as the fulfilment of a debt that the West owed to the East for long; it is the return to normalcy, the return of the East to the place where it rightfully belongs, to Europe. This completely reverses the mainstream Western view that regards the accession as the result of the democratising, liberalising and developing East fulfilling a set of political and economic criteria set by the democratic, liberal and developed West. This latter story implies that it was the West who was calling the shots and it was the East who had to do its homework. These two opposing narratives illustrate nicely why I argued that historical accuracy and rationality are not effective standards for the evaluation of myths. In and of themselves, these stories are not historically inaccurate or illogical. They nevertheless construct widely different images about, and serve different functions for, both the East and the West. While the first narrative reinforces

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<sup>334</sup> Mälksoo, “The Memory Politics of Becoming European,” 656.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, 655.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 663.

convenient stories about Eastern blamelessness and victimhood and Western debt, the second recreates the distinctions between the petulant child and the responsible adult.

Mälksoo's argument, that the ideologically colonised East needs to reclaim its right to determine its own memories, assumes a very high degree of homogeneity on both sides of the continent. First, this monolithic distinction disregards the many differences within each of these two idealised blocks. The politics of regret, with which "the West" is supposedly trying to colonise the East, looks very different in France than in Germany, for example. In fact, as I argued in the previous chapter, Germany is the great exception rather than the norm in that it is the only country in which the politics of regret has achieved a very high degree of dominance (but, as I indicated earlier, even this is a highly contingent phenomenon). Secondly, this dichotomic thinking overlooks the myriad of subaltern myths that challenge the dominant ones in both the East and the West. For example, the narrative about suffering under totalitarianisms, which is characteristic of the East according to Mälksoo, might be considered a subaltern at the European level; however, it is often in a dominant position at the national level, that is, it is prominent in the mythscapes of many Eastern European countries. While there is nothing inherently good or bad about a myth being dominant (or subaltern), it is important to bear in mind that when Mälksoo claims that Eastern European memories of communism are subaltern at the European level, she only considers half of the picture. As I argued in Chapter 2, once we extend Bell's framework to transnational and subnational levels, it is perfectly possible for a memory to be in a dominant position on one level and in a subaltern position on another. Some Eastern European memories can be a case in point. For instance, in Estonia narratives about Russian repression are certainly dominating the national mythscape, but this set of myths can be considered a minority view when we are talking about the European mythscape as a whole. The problem is that Mälksoo only seems to insist on the right of mnemonic communities to define their memories on the European level, but not on the national one. If we remain at the case of Estonia, we see that the Russian minority, which makes up a quarter of the population, favours myths that are significantly different from the majority of Estonians. Should they not have the same right to resist the "mnemopolitical authority" of the majority? If their memories are not included on the European scene, how can they become "European subjects"? If Mälksoo was consistent with her argument about the "ideological decolonization" of the repressed subaltern, she should extend the "right to memory" to every level and to every minority group. Furthermore, if any social group had the right to define and represent its memories, they should be able to do this at any level, be it subnational, national or European. This would mean, in turn, that the monolithic distinction between the East and the West would no longer be tenable; instead of only allowing nationally dominant narratives to be

part of these regional categories, all the dissenting voices that are dominated by these myths at the national level should also be considered to be part of “the Eastern” or “the Western” set of memories. To her credit, Mäliksoo did briefly consider subaltern memories in the Baltic countries when she talked about the Bronze Soldier. Nevertheless, her claim that “everyone should have the right to celebrate their victories and commemorate their losses”<sup>337</sup> only applied to national communities, but not to subnational minorities.

Mäliksoo’s apparent support for Eastern European memories of victimhood is not only problematic because she did not consider the “subalterns within the subalterns,” but also because the exclusionary nature of, and the partial support for, these victimhood narratives is overlooked. While these myths’ right to existence might be unrightfully denied by the majority at the European level, they are often similarly repressive in their own national contexts. One can hardly find a better example of nationally marginalised dissenting voices in Eastern Europe than the aforementioned Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia. Furthermore, to assume that victimhood myths are completely dominant within every Eastern European country is at best questionable. As it will be shown in the next chapter, these narratives are mostly supported by conservative political groups while the Eastern European left is usually more likely to advocate a regretful approach to the past. Additionally, Mäliksoo seems to present these victimhood narratives as if they were the natural outcome of suffering under totalitarianisms; this does not only follow the theoretically problematic lay trauma theory that I explained in Chapter 2, but it also naturalises contingent and potentially harmful social arrangements. Finally, not only do the myths of victimhood themselves reinforce the futile “victim Olympics” that I have criticised in the last chapter, but also the competition language with which Mäliksoo defends them. Deploring how little attention and research have been devoted to the dark side of communism, she contended that the “[i]nvestigators of the communist crimes have been ‘hopelessly at a disadvantage’ when compared to the investigators of the Nazi crimes.”<sup>338</sup> This competitive thinking that assumes that the researchers of Nazi and communist crimes are somehow competing against each other is exactly what leads to the mindless “number wars” and endless uniqueness-comparability debates. In her more recent works, Mäliksoo gradually distanced herself from some aspects of this initial “Eastern European freedom fighter” position. While remaining suspicious about the West expecting the East to adopt a more regretful approach to the past, she became more critical with respect to the Eastern European politics of memory,

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<sup>337</sup> Maria Mäliksoo, *The Politics of Becoming European: A Study of Polish and Baltic Post-Cold War Security Imaginaries* (London: Routledge, 2009), 110–111.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.



and to the totalising concepts of national memory and national self-determination of memories. We will return to these later works in the concluding chapter.

Finally, having explored the arguments of whom I called the “civilising Westerners” and the “Eastern freedom fighters,” we now turn to the third popular strategy that some students of the European memory wars follow which consists in trying to work out a compromise between the opposing camps. As attempts to reconcile different claims of victimhood on the European level are strongly linked to the more general competition-complementarity debate that was discussed in the previous chapter, in the following I will only consider the discussion about whether and to what extent victimhood narratives compete with each other or reinforce each other in the specific case of Europe. Advocates of this compromise approach argue that the European memory wars are based upon the false premise that victimhood narratives are inevitably locked in a competition against each other for the finite resources of public recognition and attention. Inspired by Rothberg’s idea about multidirectionality, Natan Sznaider<sup>339</sup> and Dan Stone<sup>340</sup> argued that the Europe-wide recognition and commemoration of the Holocaust does not necessarily crowd out the acknowledgement and the remembering of other suffering. They did not only assert that the European remembrance of the crimes of Nazism and communism can co-exist and that they do not necessarily exclude each other. The proponents of this multidirectional view also believe that the consolidation of the Holocaust memory regime in Europe is potentially a positive development for Eastern Europeans calling for the recognition of their own suffering since the Holocaust can provide a template, a reference point for their claims. Aleida Assmann also took this middle ground when she expressed support for a transnational European memory that incorporates both dictatorships based on Bernd Faulenbach’s formula; this states that the memory of Stalinism must not relativize that of the Holocaust, on the one hand, and the Holocaust must not trivialise the memory of Stalinist crimes, on the other.<sup>341</sup> Assmann thought that an integrated European memory built upon these principles could overcome the exclusivist rhetoric of the European memory wars. Assmann, however, did not really clarify how this formula is supposed to function in practice and it is indeed difficult to see how it would magically end the “either-or”

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<sup>339</sup> “[A] a unified European memory should recognize that divided memories result inevitably from different experiences... Michael Rothberg, with his notion of ‘multidirectional memory,’ has demonstrated the cosmopolitan potential of the memory of the Holocaust even for those who do not share its history. Memory is not a competitive zero-sum game, but can offer potential for all involved.” Natan Sznaider, “European Memory: Between Jewish and Cosmopolitan,” in *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, ed. Uilleam Blacker, Alexander Etkind, and Julie Fedor (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 63.

<sup>340</sup> “Holocaust memory need not come at the expense of the memory of communism: between transnational commemoration of the Holocaust and recognition of specific national and regional suffering under communism there can be coexistence. Memory need not be a zero-sum game.” Dan Stone, “Memory Wars in the ‘New Europe,’” in *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 726.

<sup>341</sup> Assmann, “Europe’s Divided Memory,” 33.

mentality that dominates the discussion about the two totalitarianisms. It is also clear that when Assmann called for a “dialogic memory,” she actually argued for more attention to regretful memories. For her, “monologic” memories are what I called traditional myths, while a “memory policy” with a dialogic structure is a mixture between traditional and regretful myths as it “no longer evolves exclusively around a heroic self-image but also acknowledges historical violence, suffering and trauma within a new framework of moral and historical accountability.”<sup>342</sup>

In general, I think that the goal of the compromise-seekers described above, the aim to curb the exclusivist and competitive tendencies of the European memory wars, is commendable, but the solutions that they propose are not satisfactory. Assmann, Stone and Sznajder all plan to overcome antagonism by making the category of the victim more inclusive; they thereby uphold the value of the positive recognition of victimhood and the central position of the Holocaust as a transnational template. As explained in the previous chapter with regard to the idea of multidirectional memory, both of these moves are problematic. The positive recognition of victimhood narratives (or of any type of narrative for that matter) inevitably leads to either narrative hierarchy or the pursuit of diversity for the sake of diversity, and neither of these scenarios is desirable. Making the Holocaust constitutive of the mythscape reinforces its status as the primary point of reference and entails its recognition as either uniquely evil or first among equals, and neither of these assumptions is likely to satisfy the advocates of other victimhood narratives who regard the Holocaust as a rival. In fact, many scholars in this compromise-seeking camp talk about the Holocaust as constitutive of European integration, as the “founding narrative of European memory culture,”<sup>343</sup> in a way that it seems that for them it is almost a fact of social life. While a decade ago most academic accounts only speculated whether the Holocaust could become a common European memory,<sup>344</sup> its commemoration has been recently hailed as “a new civilian religion in Europe”<sup>345</sup> and as something that “has been agreed upon [to be] the foundation myth of Europe.”<sup>346</sup> Such generalising statements raise a number of questions. Is it possible to agree on the founding myth of a community? Who can do this and under what authority? Is it conceivable that a community, especially one as diverse and contested as the European one, has a single founding narrative which everyone agrees upon? Should scholars talk about social

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<sup>342</sup> Aleida Assmann, “The Transformative Power of Memory,” in *Memory and Change in Europe: Eastern Perspectives*, ed. Malgorzata Pakier and Joanna Wawrzyniak (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 30.

<sup>343</sup> Harald Welzer and Claudia Lenz, “Is There a ‘European Memory’? First Results of Comparative Research on Historical Consciousness and Family Memories,” in *Clashes in European Memory: The Case of Communist Repression and the Holocaust*, ed. Muriel Blaive, Christian Gerbel, and Thomas Lindenberger (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2011), 195.

<sup>344</sup> Dan Diner, *Beyond the Conceivable: Studies on Germany, Nazism, and the Holocaust* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000); Judt, *Postwar*; Assmann, “Europe: A Community of Memory?”

<sup>345</sup> Welzer and Lenz, “Is There a ‘European Memory’?” 195.

<sup>346</sup> Assmann, “Europe’s Divided Memory,” 28.

phenomena as things “out there” and assume that their statements do not influence them? Based on the answers I gave to these questions in Part I, I argue that such an uncritical and instrumentalist approach to the commemoration of the Holocaust, or of any other historical event for that matter, is inappropriate. The role of academics is not to engage in institutionalised myth-making, in “Euro-nation building through negative memory building,”<sup>347</sup> by asking questions about whether the Holocaust can or cannot be a memory for Europe, or about whether Europe needs a negative creation myth such as the Holocaust or a positive one such as European integration.<sup>348</sup> I agree with compromise-seekers that it is important to overcome the present antagonism of the European memory wars, but the way to do this is not by making one side’s myth constitutive of the discussion.

This leads us to the most problematic part of the compromise-seeking agenda which is that no empirical evidence is given to support the basic assumption that memory is not (or not necessarily) a competitive zero-sum game. On what basis can one say that victimhood narratives always complement rather than substitute each other? How can one be sure that the Holocaust is a template rather than a rival in every situation (or that it is the other way around)? As I explained in Chapter 4, it is impossible to show that calls for solidarity with past victims crowd each other out or provide a template for each other in a particular situation. Instead of arguing over such essentially unresolvable differences, I propose a conception of European memory (or, more precisely, of a European mythscape) that is built on the pluralist approach to myth developed in Part I. This a way to overcome antagonism that avoids the problems associated with positive recognition, template narratives and the assumption about complementarity. Before explaining in detail what this entails in the concluding chapter, I critically examine the conceptions of European memory that are prevalent outside academia in order to see what problems they encounter and what we can learn from them.

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<sup>347</sup> Müller, “On ‘European Memory,’” 36.

<sup>348</sup> Leggewie and Lang, *Der Kampf Um Die Europäische Erinnerung*.



## 6

### Historical Trajectories of the Idea of European Memory

Our categories of thought do not exist in a vacuum; they are intimately tied to the socio-political environment in which they perform. The attempt to make sense of the idea of European memory should thus begin with historicising the concept, with investigating the historical context within which it has emerged and has become prominent. The following genealogical account of the concept sets the stage for the next chapter where the different understandings of the idea are explored and critically assessed in detail. This chapter identifies when and where the idea of European memory has been invoked and outlines these historical contexts; primarily, it shows how the concept became central in the European memory wars. What the concept actually meant in different occasions and for different social actors will be examined in the following chapter.

The idea of European memory is relatively recent; it has only been systematically used since the mid-2000s even though there had been some isolated occurrences in the 1990s. Other concepts to which the term “European memory” is often understood to refer are naturally older and more established. For instance, the idea of European history, the idea to “treat the history of Europe as an aggregate of the histories of the different countries,”<sup>349</sup> rose to prominence in the 1620s. Discussions about European identity became ubiquitous after the Copenhagen Declaration on European Identity in 1973. Historical references abounded in the earliest treaties and speeches of the European integration process. The concept of European memory itself, however, has only been widely used in the last decade. In the following, I will first examine textual references that can be seen as preludes to the idea of European memory and then turn to the emergence and the popularisation of the concept itself.

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<sup>349</sup> Francis Harry Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace: Theory and Practice in the History of Relations Between States* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 157.

## Preludes to the Idea of European Memory

The most basic precedents of the concept of European memory can be considered to be the references to historical events and to their impact on present political arrangements that are made within European institutions. As Aline Sierp showed,<sup>350</sup> references to the Second World War and to its devastating effects were integral to the early days of European integration and were employed to argue for the need for co-operation between states. The “Europe out of war” narrative usually evokes the horrors of the war, claims that peace can only be safeguarded by creative means and concludes that innovative cross-border co-operation is necessary. This line of reasoning was pursued in Robert Schumann’s famous speech in 1950 and in the opening sentence of the preamble to the Treaty of Paris which established the European Coal and Steel Community (signed in 1951).<sup>351</sup> However, Sierp demonstrated that after these initial occurrences, the number and the importance of historical references to the war decreased sharply. In the Treaty of Rome (signed in 1957), the intention to safeguard peace is only mentioned as one of the numerous aims of the newly formed European Economic Community.<sup>352</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, the “Europe out of war” argument disappeared almost completely from treaties, Commission documents and speeches.

The period from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s is known by some as the “‘lost decade’ of European integration,”<sup>353</sup> as the time when integration virtually came to a halt; although the scope of European integration was broadened by the Mediterranean enlargements, its depth largely stagnated. After this period, the number and the importance of historical references made at the European level increased exponentially. 1985, the fortieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, can be regarded in many ways as a starting point of this process as the European Parliament passed two resolutions commemorating the end of the war and its atrocities.<sup>354</sup> It was also the year when Jacques Delors became the president of the European Commission and set in motion a series of events that revived the integration process. Sierp mentioned many historical references in the documents of European institutions and the speeches of European officials after this date. The number of references erupted in the early 1990s, when it became possible to think outside the frozen dichotomy of the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet Union also meant that proponents of European integration lost their main Other, the main geopolitical force against

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<sup>350</sup> Sierp, *History, Memory, and Trans-European Identity*.

<sup>351</sup> “Treaty Establishing the European Coal and Steel Community,” April 18, 1951.

<sup>352</sup> “Treaty Establishing the European Economic Community,” March 25, 1957.

<sup>353</sup> Bottici and Challand, *Imagining Europe*, 117.

<sup>354</sup> European Parliament, “Resolution Commemorating the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Cessation of Hostilities,” February 14, 1985; European Parliament, “Resolution on the Commemoration of 8 May 1945,” February 14, 1985.

which they defined themselves. This sudden and unexpected event might explain why they turned to other, older legitimating stories such as the “Europe out of war” narrative in this period.

There is, however, an important difference between the references to the Second World War made in the early 1950s and in the early 1990s. On the one hand, the first references treated the war as a deplorable, devastating event but refrained from mentioning specific events and from assigning levels of moral responsibility to specific actors. The reason for this might be that just a few years after the war a narrative could only seek consensus among the victors and the vanquished if it glossed over the issue of agency, and if it framed the war as a quasi-external shock as a result of which everyone in Europe suffered greatly. On the other hand, the narratives of the early 1990s had a much more moralising tone and speeches made at the European level constantly made references to one particularly (some would say uniquely) terrible aspect of the war, the Holocaust. These historical accounts subscribed to a minimalist understanding of the Holocaust, identifying the victims (the European Jews) and the perpetrators (the authorities of Nazi Germany) very clearly and restrictively, and claimed that the European edifice is the guarantee that this will “never again” happen. The two resolutions of the European Parliament passed in 1993 and in 1995 indicate the increasing attention paid to the matter.<sup>355</sup> This interest in the Holocaust at the European level is not surprising in the light of the national debates that already took place in the 1980s (as explained in Chapter 4).

The “never again” claim was undermined by the inability of Europe to intervene and to stop ethnic cleansing in its own “backyard” during the Bosnia crisis in 1995. This humiliating experience, Müller claimed,<sup>356</sup> bolstered those calling for stronger normative foundations for the EU. The result of this, the increasing emphasis on human rights, was intimately connected to the increasing attention paid to the Holocaust, similarly to other parts of the world. In the late 1990s, national days of the commemoration of the Holocaust became more and more common in Europe and throughout the world (the most prominent advocates being Sweden and the UK). The Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust of 2000 was a landmark event in the process that gave a transnational standing to the commemoration of the Holocaust. Leading politicians and researchers from forty-six states participated in the conference and adopted a declaration expressing a commitment for education, research and commemoration related to the Holocaust. Among others, the signatories committed themselves to the inauguration of national annual

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<sup>355</sup> European Parliament, “Resolution on European and International Protection for Nazi Concentration Camps As Historical Monuments,” February 11, 1993; European Parliament, “Resolution on a Day to Commemorate the Holocaust,” June 15, 1995.

<sup>356</sup> Müller, “On ‘European Memory.’”

Holocaust remembrance days (without specifying the exact date). A year later, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a recommendation that linked the commemoration of the Holocaust to the teaching of history.<sup>357</sup> The Stockholm Declaration was already a more global event than a distinctly European one, and five years later, on the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, the commemoration of the Holocaust became truly international. Ten years after the Resolution on a Day to Commemorate the Holocaust of 1995, the EP once more encouraged the adoption of a European Holocaust Memorial Day and also specified the date this time as 27 January, the date of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp.<sup>358</sup> This initiative, however, largely became redundant when the General Assembly of the UN made this day an international remembrance day in the same year.<sup>359</sup> In the end, this day only became an official European Parliament event.

The year of 2005 was not only remarkable with respect to the transnationalisation of the commemoration of the Holocaust. A number of political initiatives emerged which can be considered the precursors of the idea of European memory in certain respects. Most importantly, the draft of the ambitious Constitutional Treaty (signed in 2004) made a reference to “the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe”<sup>360</sup> which was in sharp contrast to the generally forward-looking texts of previous treaties. The European Constitution was ultimately rejected after the decisive “No” of the French and Dutch referenda, but the heated debate about the wording of the preamble that had preceded the signature of the treaty had a great impact on later discussions about Europe’s past and narratives of self-identification. Specifically, at the centre of the controversy was the question whether references to Christianity should be made when talking about Europe’s “inheritance.” The narrative of “‘Christian Europe’ ... points to the historical experience of the Christian Roman Empire as the first experiment of European unification, to the contribution of the Christian intellectuals traveling from one university to another as the first examples of European travelers, and to the feeling of sameness generated by the idea of being part of ‘Christendom’.”<sup>361</sup> This position was most powerfully advanced by Joseph Weiler who thought that by not incorporating a reference to Christianity in the preamble, Europe missed an important opportunity to overcome its “Christophobia.”<sup>362</sup> The most common objection to the “Christian Europe” narrative is that while the notion of Christianitas includes many people who do not live

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<sup>357</sup> Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, “Recommendation on History Teaching in ‘Twenty-First-Century Europe,’” October 31, 2001.

<sup>358</sup> European Parliament, “Resolution on Remembrance of the Holocaust, Anti-Semitism and Racism,” January 27, 2005.

<sup>359</sup> General Assembly of the United Nations, “Resolution on the Holocaust Remembrance,” November 1, 2005.

<sup>360</sup> “Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe,” October 29, 2004.

<sup>361</sup> Bottici and Challand, *Imagining Europe*, 99.

<sup>362</sup> Joseph Weiler, *L’Europe chrétienne ? Une excursion* (Paris: Cerf, 2007).



in geographical Europe (even if understood in the broadest sense), it excludes many who do live in geographical Europe (even if understood in the narrowest sense). Bottici and Challand identified two other core narratives, those of “Classical Europe” and “Enlightened Europe,” whose “alliance” won the debate about the preamble of the Constitution. The former traces the roots of European culture back to the ancient Greek and Roman civilisations. Classical Greece, in particular, is viewed as the “cradle of European civilisation” and the “birthplace of philosophy.” The “Enlightened Europe” narrative, on the other hand, regards Europe as the birthplace of modernity, rationality and the scientific approach. By drawing “inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law,”<sup>363</sup> the preamble of the European Constitution joined the classical and enlightened narratives together in a subtle way. The Lisbon Treaty (signed in 2007), which successfully entered into force in 2009, preserved exactly the same passage in its preamble.

Another initiative in 2005 which did not gather sufficient political support in the end was a Europe-wide ban on the display of totalitarian symbols that was discussed and finally dropped in the EP. The significance of this event comes from the fact that it was the first major clash in what would later be known as the “East-West memory divide.” The original proposal aimed to ban the swastika in order to combat anti-Semitism and racism in Europe. However, this quickly ran into the opposition of a group of mostly conservative Eastern European MEPs<sup>364</sup> who insisted that if the display of the swastika was to be banned, the use of the red star and the hammer and sickle should also be prohibited. Their reasoning was that banning the symbols of Nazism but not those of communism would lead to unjustifiable double standards. This was the first instance that the hegemony and the “uniqueness” of the Holocaust was questioned on the European level, arguably as a result of the changing composition of the EP after the Eastern enlargement of 2004. The debate about whether the two totalitarian systems are comparable, equally criminal or should be treated separately has overshadowed discussions of European memory ever since.

Other less ambitious initiatives, however, succeeded in the same year. The EP did manage to adopt resolutions on the tenth anniversary of Srebrenica, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Solidarity, and on the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe.<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>363</sup> “Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe.”

<sup>364</sup> The most active members of this group were Vytautas Landsbergis (EPP, Lithuania), Tunne Kelam (EPP, Estonia), József Szájer (EPP, Hungary).

<sup>365</sup> European Parliament, “Resolution on Srebrenica,” July 7, 2005; European Parliament, “Resolution on the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Solidarity and Its Message for Europe,” September 28, 2005; European Parliament, “Resolution on the Sixtieth Anniversary of the End of the Second World War in Europe on 8 May 1945,” May 12, 2005.

Crucially, the latter contained the first ever mention of the term “European memory” in the official documents of European institutions. This does not mean, however, that it instantly became a core concept of European initiatives related to the public representation of past events. In the following years, the EP adopted a number of resolutions on various historical matters without invoking the idea of European memory.<sup>366</sup> In the last decade, the idea of European memory has risen to prominence through a slow process that is intimately intertwined with the European memory wars.

### **The Emergence of the Idea of European Memory**

Bearing in mind that it is always an oversimplification to associate slowly changing socio-political processes to particular moments in history, it is nevertheless a relatively uncontroversial claim that the year 2005 played a pivotal role in the development of the concept of European memory. Although it is true that many of the processes were well underway by this date, some genuinely new elements are clearly attributable to the mid-2000s. The commemoration of the Holocaust had gradually become more and more transnational since the early 1990s, but the decision of the General Assembly meant its complete internationalisation. By this time, the positively ancient, agent-free “Europe out of war” narrative had been completely replaced by that of the Holocaust and many began to think about it as the “founding myth” of Europe.<sup>367</sup>

It was also in 2005 that this exclusive emphasis on the Holocaust created tensions and led to open confrontation within European institutions for the first time. Admittedly, the debate about the uniqueness, comparability and relativization of the Holocaust was definitely not new; as explained in Chapter 4, it was the central topic of the German *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s. It even appeared on the European level in the 1990s, albeit in a very limited way; Sierp noted that at the time when the EP debated the Resolution on a Day to Commemorate the Holocaust in 1995, a representative already expressed hope that the victims of communism would also be commemorated in the future.<sup>368</sup> However, such isolated occurrences, of which there might well be many, do not change the larger patterns according to which debates unfolded over time. I maintain that the question about the uniqueness and the comparability of the Holocaust, and the commemoration of the victims of communism did not become visible, central issues in European

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<sup>366</sup> European Parliament, “Resolution on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and Its Historical Meaning for Europe,” October 26, 2006; European Parliament, “Resolution on the Commemoration of the Holodomor, the Ukraine Artificial Famine (1932-1933),” October 23, 2008; European Parliament, “Resolution of 15 January 2009 on Srebrenica,” January 15, 2009; European Parliament, “Resolution on the Occasion of International Roma Day. Anti-Gypsyism in Europe and EU Recognition of the Memorial Day of the Roma Genocide During World War II,” April 15, 2015; European Parliament, “Resolution on the Centenary of the Armenian Genocide,” April 15, 2015.

<sup>367</sup> Lothar Probst, “Founding Myths in Europe and the Role of the Holocaust,” *New German Critique*, no. 90 (2003): 45–58.

<sup>368</sup> Sierp, *History, Memory, and Trans-European Identity*, 134.

institutions until the mid-2000s, until after the Eastern enlargement. Markus Josef Prutsch also agreed that it was in 2005 that “the torment and anguish endured by Eastern European peoples under Communist rule powerfully entered the EU’s agenda.”<sup>369</sup>

An important prelude to the debate about banning totalitarian symbols was a speech given in Leipzig by Sandra Kalniete who was expected to become the Latvian member of the European Commission. In March 2004, she caused public outcry in Germany when she declared Nazism and communism “equally criminal” and called for the equal treatment of the victims of both totalitarian regimes. The German press subsequently accused Kalniete of making an “illegitimate comparison,” of “downgrading the Holocaust” and even of “anti-Semitism.”<sup>370</sup> The initiatives on banning Nazi and communist symbols decisively elevated this debate to the level of European institutions in the next year. The catalyst for the original proposal against the swastika was the public scandal that followed the publication of photos about Prince Harry, an heir to the throne of the UK, dressed as a Nazi German officer in January 2005. However, after it became clear that no consensus could be reached about the totalitarian symbols to be banned, the plan was dropped altogether in February 2005.<sup>371</sup>

The controversial issue nevertheless remained and communist atrocities received more and more attention at the European level in the following years. The first official EU document invoking the idea of European memory,<sup>372</sup> the resolution on the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe adopted in May 2005, already offered a recognition of the crimes of communism, albeit a limited and ambiguous one. The resolution depicted the war as primarily a struggle against Nazism which ignored that the principal enemy of several countries which did not have fascist political systems before the war (for instance, Finland) was the Soviet Union. Similarly, recognising the “tyranny inflicted” by the Soviet Union after the war left the story of wartime Soviet aggression and repression untold. The resolution even paid a “special tribute” to the Soviet Union, among others, for its fight against Nazism, while nothing was said about the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Notably, the EP did acknowledge “the magnitude of the suffering, injustice and long-term social, political and economic degradation endured by the captive nations located on the eastern side of what was to become the Iron Curtain” and confirmed “its united stand against all totalitarian rule of whatever ideological persuasion.” This wording carefully

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<sup>369</sup> Markus Josef Prutsch, “European Historical Memory: Policies, Challenges and Perspectives” (Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the European Union, 2013), 23.

<sup>370</sup> Quoted in Troebst, “Halecki Revisited,” 60.

<sup>371</sup> “EU-Wide Nazi Symbols Ban Rejected,” *BBC News*, February 24, 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4294907.stm>.

<sup>372</sup> Confirmed by an exact match search for the term “European memory” in the EUR-Lex database and the European Parliament’s collection of adopted texts.

avoided the issue of comparing different totalitarian systems and of establishing a hierarchy among them. It must be noted, however, that the EP did not specify which political systems it considered totalitarian and thus left obscure what exactly it unitedly stood against. The resolution did mention the “communist dictatorship,” the “tyranny inflicted by the Stalinist Soviet Union,” the “Nazi tyranny,” but at no point did it associate either of these with totalitarianism. Such deliberate vagueness is characteristic of this EP resolution which is clearly a carefully worded political compromise on a very sensitive topic. Even so, it managed to anger some (mostly Western European left-wing) MEPs who saw it as an attempt to discredit communism by equating it with Nazism. They criticised the proposal in the parliamentary debate that preceded its acceptance on the grounds that it disregarded the role that the communist resistance in Europe and the communist Soviet Union played in the defeat of Nazism.

Despite considerable opposition by these MEPs, the subsequent resolution on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Solidarity, accepted in September 2005, made a clearer statement with respect to the atrocities committed by communist regimes. More precisely, it praised actions against one particular communist system at a particular point in time (against the Polish authorities in 1980) and labelled this political system “totalitarian” three times in the text. Therefore, the resolution is far from calling all communist systems totalitarian and from condemning the crimes committed by all of them (as did the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe a few months later). Nevertheless, its acceptance is a small victory for what I call the “anti-communist group” (this refers to the loosely connected group of politicians and intellectuals who operate at the European level and argue for acknowledging more widely and for paying more attention to the crimes of communism in diverse fora, most importantly, in educational, cultural and research projects). The resolution did go further than the special case of Poland in 1980 by recognising the effort of “all people of central and eastern Europe who fought for human rights, freedom, solidarity and the unity of Europe.” The decision even intended to “place it in the collective memory of Europe” by urging the commemoration of this effort on 31 August, “the Day of Freedom and Solidarity.” There is a clear parallel between this resolution and that on the commemoration of the Holocaust adopted eight months earlier. An Eastern European narrative was offered a “place” in European memory and in the European calendar, next to the already established Holocaust narrative and the redundant European Holocaust Memorial Day. This place, however, was substantially different from that reserved for the victims of the Holocaust. The resolution on Solidarity did not portray Eastern Europeans as victims of grave crimes (words that were completely absent from the text), but as peaceful freedom fighters (terms that dominated the text). However appealing this image may be for some people, it did not satisfy those who called

for the recognition of communist crimes along with those of Nazism and who felt that Eastern Europeans were treated as “second-class victims.” The resolution on Solidarity thus failed to resolve the “East-West memory divide” which has dominated the “European memory agenda” ever since.

It is worth noting that, in the resolutions of 2005 on the end of the Second World War and on Solidarity, the first two mentions of the term “European memory” and the first two (limited) recognitions of communist crimes in the official documents of European institutions were intimately connected. This is the opening of the European memory wars and I thus consider 2005 to be a symbolic turning point in public discussions about Europe’s past. In the first half of the decade, debates were dominated by the Classical, Christian and Enlightened Europe perspectives while a (Western European) consensus was slowly being formed around the importance of the Holocaust. After the failure of the European Constitution, attention decisively shifted from the “European inheritance” narratives to more recent history, namely to the old “Europe out of war” narrative with the Holocaust in its centre. However, just when the Holocaust had achieved a certain degree of hegemony and was boldly proclaimed to be on its way to become “the foundational event for a European collective memory,”<sup>373</sup> it came to be challenged by a (mostly Eastern European conservative) group who believed that their victimhood myth was equally worthy of recognition. This happened in 2005 for at least two reasons. First, the size and the composition of the EP changed drastically after the elections of June 2004 and the effect of the work of Eastern European MEPs could be seen in the following year. Secondly, this was a year of important anniversaries ending in zero and five which usually serve as good grounds for political action. While 2005 was the starting point of a crucial European debate, it must not be forgotten that it was also the beginning of rapprochement in some respects. The European Network Remembrance and Solidarity (ENRS) was created by the governments of Germany, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia whose purpose is to support research and education in twentieth-century European history. This was significant in the light of the numerous clashes between the dominant myths in Germany and Poland on the one hand, and Hungary and Slovakia on the other. Since then, the ENRS has become an important forum in negotiating the “European culture of remembrance.”

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<sup>373</sup> Diner, “Restitution and Memory,” 43.

## **The Rise of the Idea of European Memory**

The East-West memory debate continued after the tumultuous 2005 with the anti-communist group claiming some important victories. In January 2006, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted the landmark Resolution 1481 on the Need for International Condemnation of Crimes of Totalitarian Communist Regimes which was in many respects stronger than those of the European Parliament a year earlier.<sup>374</sup> It did specify sufficiently clearly some political systems (“the totalitarian communist regimes which ruled in central and eastern Europe in the last century, and which are still in power in several countries in the world”) and it did explicitly condemn them. Göran Lindblad, member of the Swedish Parliament, served as the rapporteur of the resolution and remained active in the later “memory debates” on the European level. This resolution was a strong blanket condemnation of all totalitarian communist regimes (even present ones) but it did not denounce communist parties or communist ideology as such. It even recognised that “some European communist parties have made contributions to achieving democracy.” The adoption of the text nevertheless outraged many communist parties, most notably in France. The most controversial part of the resolution was the comparability that it implied between the crimes of Nazism and those of totalitarian communist regimes; it emphasised that the perpetrators of the former had been brought to trial, while those of the latter had not. It is important to note that the resolution is not legally binding and, mainly due to the opposition of communist and Russian representatives, it was adopted by the Assembly but failed to achieve a two-thirds majority.

Also in 2006, the commemoration of the victims of Stalinism became one of the goals of the Europe for Citizens programme, an initiative of the European Commission with the aim to promote European citizenship. In December, a joint decision of the European Parliament and the Council set the objectives for this programme for the period 2007-2013, and the “action” called “Active European Remembrance” envisaged funding for projects commemorating the victims of Stalinism as well as those of Nazism.<sup>375</sup> Similarly to previous initiatives in this vein, giving a “place” to the commemoration of the victims of Stalinism in “European remembrance” next to those of Nazism did not mean that they were treated equally. In the decision, the European Parliament and the Council were much more specific about the type of commemoration they envisaged for the victims of Nazism than for those of Stalinism and this was reflected in the number of projects

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<sup>374</sup> Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, “Resolution 1481 on the Need for International Condemnation of Crimes of Totalitarian Communist Regimes,” January 25, 2006.

<sup>375</sup> European Parliament and Council of the European Union, “Decision No 1904/2006/EC Establishing for the Period 2007 to 2013 the Programme ‘Europe for Citizens’ to Promote Active European Citizenship,” December 12, 2006.

funded. According to the official selection results, out of the thirty-six projects selected in 2007 for “Action 4 Active European Remembrance,” thirty-four (almost all of them) dealt with Nazism while only nine included Stalinism in its theme.<sup>376</sup>

Additionally, a closer look at the historical background of how agreement was reached about the first edition of the Europe for Citizens programme illustrates nicely the early development of the memory wars and supports the previous observation about the dramatic impact of the Eastern enlargement. Since the aforementioned EP resolution of 1993,<sup>377</sup> each year the EU has contributed to the preservation of concentration camps with a part of its general budget (under Heading A-3035). In April 2004, the Parliament and the Council adopted a “Community Action Programme to Promote Bodies Active at European Level in the Field of Culture” which, among many other things, reinforced this commitment and it was not a matter of debate during the long codecision procedure.<sup>378</sup> In July 2004, the Commission put forward a “Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council Establishing the Culture 2007 Programme (2007-2013)”;<sup>379</sup> the Culture programme was a programme that ran parallel to the Europe for Citizens programme and was also managed by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency. The original proposal referred to the Community Action Programme adopted earlier that year and reiterated that the “European and international protection of Nazi concentration camp sites as historic monuments” is “worthwhile pursuing.” Interestingly, the opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the proposal, published in February 2005, included some suggestions which can be considered quite radical at that time.<sup>380</sup> It did not only propose that the “programme should also be open to projects associated with deportations, concentration camp sites and commemoration of victims who suffered under the Soviet totalitarian regime,” but also that the “Soviet regime was a totalitarian one ... not less harmful than the Nazi totalitarian regime.” The opinion of the Committee stopped short of calling both regimes “equally criminal” when it stated that the “former concentration camp sites within the system of the Soviet totalitarian regime are understood as forced-labour camps and are referred equal to the ones existed in the Nazi regime.” Not surprisingly, this radical comparison was not retained in the subsequent stages of the codecision procedure where the Committee of the Regions carries relatively little weight anyway;

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<sup>376</sup> [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/citizenship/funding/2007/selections/documents/selection\\_action4\\_2007.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/citizenship/funding/2007/selections/documents/selection_action4_2007.pdf)

<sup>377</sup> European Parliament, “Resolution on European and International Protection for Nazi Concentration Camps As Historical Monuments.”

<sup>378</sup> European Parliament and Council of the European Union, “Decision No 792/2004/EC Establishing a Community Action Programme to Promote Bodies Active at European Level in the Field of Culture,” April 21, 2004.

<sup>379</sup> European Commission, “Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council Establishing the Culture 2007 Programme,” July 14, 2004.

<sup>380</sup> Committee of the Regions, “Opinion on the ‘Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council Establishing the Culture 2007 Programme (2007-2013),’” February 23, 2005.

what is surprising, however, is that the original reference to the “European and international protection of Nazi concentration camp sites” was also edited out of the final text.<sup>381</sup> Deliberation on the Europe for Citizens programme started shortly after the opinion of the Committee of the Regions in April 2005. The Active European Remembrance theme was completely missing from the original proposal of the Commission;<sup>382</sup> it was only added by the EP’s Committee on Culture and Education before its proposal’s first reading in the Parliament.<sup>383</sup> It is also worth noting that the Committee first voted down the inclusion of a theme that focuses on Nazism and communism.

Finally, a resolution was passed by the European Parliament in October 2006 on the fiftieth anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution. This could be interpreted as another attempt to “appease” the anti-communist group were it not for the fact that it repeated the double game played by the resolution on the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe. The EP called “on all democratic countries to clearly condemn the crimes committed by all totalitarian regimes” but refrained from labelling the Hungarian communist regime of 1956 totalitarian, preferring the less controversial titles “undemocratic” and “dictatorial.”

The PACE resolution, the ECP and the EP resolution explained above are three important moments in the unfolding of the “East-West memory debate,” but the idea of European memory was not invoked in any of these. The concept only became more central to these debates in the following years. Most importantly, a group of politicians, government officials and other intellectuals called for the establishment of an Institute of European Memory and Conscience in a document known as the Prague Declaration. Signed in June 2008, the declaration claimed that, similarly to Nazi atrocities, the crimes committed by communist regimes should be recognised, commemorated and taught throughout Europe. While the text did not go as far as saying that the two totalitarianisms are “equally criminal,” it stated that “there are substantial similarities between Nazism and Communism in terms of their horrific and appalling character and their crimes against humanity.”<sup>384</sup> Furthermore, the declaration did treat the two “evils” as equal in the sense that “consciousness of the crimes against humanity committed by the Communist regimes throughout the continent must inform all European minds to the same extent as the Nazi regimes [*sic*] crimes did.” These arguments about comparability and equality are of course nothing revolutionary; what

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<sup>381</sup> European Parliament and Council of the European Union, “Decision No 1855/2006/EC Establishing the Culture Programme,” December 12, 2006.

<sup>382</sup> European Commission, “Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council Establishing for the Period 2007-2013 the Programme ‘Citizens for Europe’ to Promote Active European Citizenship,” April 6, 2005.

<sup>383</sup> Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament, “Report on the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council Establishing for the Period 2007-2013 the Programme ‘Citizens for Europe’ to Promote Active European Citizenship,” March 23, 2006.

<sup>384</sup> “Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism.”



is new in the Prague Declaration, however, is that this cause manifested itself as a pan-European effort of leading public figures and that the anti-communist group decisively connected the concept of European memory to their agenda. Arguing that “Europe will not be united unless it is able to reunite its history, recognize Communism and Nazism as a common legacy,”<sup>385</sup> the declaration was a clear message to those who had previously argued that the Holocaust was or should be *the* founding memory for Europe. The main point of the signatories was that there could and should be a united European memory, but this is only possible if equal weight is given to both Nazism and communism. Following this logic, the declaration went as far as calling for “a day of remembrance of the victims of both Nazi and Communist totalitarian regimes, in the same way Europe remembers the victims of the Holocaust on January 27<sup>th</sup>”; the day of commemoration was proposed to be the anniversary of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 23 August 1939 which was supposed to represent well the aggressive nature of both totalitarian regimes. By explicitly demanding that the victims of Nazism and communism be remembered “in the same way” as those of the Holocaust, the proposal of the day of commemoration was the most overt bid of the anti-communist group for a “place in the sun” of European memory. Furthermore, the Prague Declaration was a stronger blanket condemnation of communism than any of the previously mentioned texts. Its scope was far larger than merely Stalinism (with which the Europe for Citizens programme was concerned at that time) and it even went further than condemning only those communist systems and parties that were totalitarian (which was what the resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe did). The Prague Declaration put forward the bold, and highly contestable, claim that communist ideology itself is “directly responsible for crimes against humanity.”<sup>386</sup>

Naturally, the loosely connected group of public figures behind the Prague Declaration could make radical and highly controversial statements because the text was not a product of political compromise achieved in some European institution. The lack of formal institutional backing also meant that, as strong as the language of the declaration was, it did not carry too much weight. Surprisingly, however, many of the claims put forward in the declaration were accepted by the EP in the following year. The proclamation of 23 August as a European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism quickly gathered support. A written declaration in this vein was signed by the majority of MEPs in September 2008, a few months after the signature of the Prague Declaration (note that such declarations cannot be considered binding for the EP).<sup>387</sup> Half

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<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid.

<sup>387</sup> European Parliament, “Declaration on the Proclamation of 23 August as European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism,” September 23, 2008.

a year later, the EP adopted the Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism (RECT) in April 2009 which incorporated even more of the demands of the Prague Declaration.<sup>388</sup> It agreed with the signatories of the latter in that “Europe will not be united unless it is able to form a common view of its history, recognises Nazism, Stalinism and fascist and Communist regimes as a common legacy.” The resolution of 2009 also supported the two most tangible goals of the Prague Declaration. It proclaimed 23 August a “Europe-wide Day of Remembrance for the Victims of All Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes” and called for the establishment of a Platform of European Memory and Conscience. It must nevertheless be noted that the resolution aimed to avoid the most controversial parts of the Prague Declaration. Apart from grouping both Nazism and communism under the broad term “totalitarianisms,” it refrained from making any comparison between the two. It did not advocate the commemoration of 23 August “in the same way Europe remembers the victims of the Holocaust” and drawing parallels was avoided even in the naming of the day of commemoration: the originally proposed “European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism” was changed to the broader (and more vague) “Europe-wide Day of Remembrance for the Victims of All Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes.”<sup>389</sup> Most importantly, the resolution emphasised that “the uniqueness of the Holocaust must nevertheless be acknowledged,” thus attempting to take a clear stance in the seemingly never ending uniqueness-comparability debate. Despite these careful measures, most of those who spoke against the resolution in the EP debate (and thereafter) claimed that the text “equates” the two regimes, “normalises” (or at least, “dilutes the uniqueness” of) Nazi crimes and/or “criminalises” communist ideology.

A few months later, many of the suggestions of the EP resolution were also endorsed by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in July 2009. It condemned “totalitarian rule from whatever ideological background,” emphasised that “European countries experienced two major totalitarian regimes, Nazi and Stalinist,” and expressed support for a “Europe-wide Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism.”<sup>390</sup> The OSCE resolution caused a controversy in which the arguments were similar to those in the debate that took place in the EP. The most significant difference was the response from Russia. The quasi-nostalgic attitude towards the Soviet past promoted by the Russian

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<sup>388</sup> European Parliament, “Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism,” April 2, 2009.

<sup>389</sup> Note that this change did not prevent certain member states from naming the day of commemoration according to their own preferences. The “Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism” is observed by the Baltic states, Hungary and Sweden whereas Bulgaria went as far as naming 23 August the “Day of Commemoration of the Victims of the Crimes Committed by Communist and other Totalitarian Regimes,” thus effectively emphasising communist totalitarianism over others.

<sup>390</sup> Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, “Resolution on Divided Europe Reunited: Promoting Human Rights and Civil Liberties in the OSCE Region in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” July 3, 2009.

government, increasingly strongly since Putin's ascension to power, is in direct conflict with calls for the commemoration of the crimes attributed to Stalinism, to other totalitarian communist regimes or to communist ideology in general. The difference between the reception of the two resolutions mentioned above is that while Russian officials vehemently criticised the EP resolution as "outsiders," Russian delegates in the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE could oppose that text "from the inside." Similarly to the resolution adopted by the PACE, the OSCE resolution was not legally binding. In the following year, the EP also proclaimed the founding of a "collective European memory" as one of the main objectives of Europeana, the European digital library.<sup>391</sup>

As we have seen before in the case of earlier transnational European memory initiatives, "round" anniversaries usually provide a good pretext for pushing forward commemorative events and resolutions. The important resolutions of 2009 (and the preparatory events leading up to them) can be explained in this vein, as catalysed by the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. However, the changing composition of the EP and the "round" anniversary of such a pivotal historical moment should only be seen as factors providing the structural possibilities which allowed the transnational comparisons between totalitarianisms (and the subsequent European memory wars) to emerge. If we are to pay sufficient attention to agency in this matter, it is important to consider the actual actors who pushed for and opposed such political developments.

### **The Actors in the Debate about the Idea of European Memory**

If we look at the relevant historical processes from this angle, it does make sense to talk about a (pan-European) anti-communist group. The reason is that not only the arguments of pan-European efforts to recognise Nazism and communism as comparably or equally evil are similar, but the people sponsoring them form a rather clearly identifiable group. Immediately after the first two signatories the Prague Declaration (Václav Havel, former President of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic, and Joachim Gauck, former Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records and now President of Germany), one can find Göran Lindblad, rapporteur of the PACE resolution of 2006. Until 2010, Lindblad was a Swedish MP for the right-wing Moderate Party and was also a member, and later vice-president, of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. In 2011, he became the director of the newly-formed Platform of European Memory and Conscience, a project which the EP resolution of 2009 called for but did not actively pursue. Also among the first founding signatures are two of those Eastern European conservative MEPs, Vytautas Landsbergis (EPP, Lithuania) and Tunne Kelam (EPP, Estonia), who were the most vocal advocates of extending the proposed Europe-wide ban on totalitarian symbols of 2005 to

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<sup>391</sup> European Parliament, "Resolution on 'Europeana—The Next Steps,'" May 5, 2010.

communist insignia. In addition to them, a small group of (almost exclusively Eastern European conservative) MEPs were closely involved in the two events that catalysed the signature of the Prague Declaration and also signed it subsequently. In January 2008, Kelam and Landsbergis organised an EP conference and proposed the establishment of a working group on “United Europe–United History” along with three other Eastern European conservative MEPs, Girts Valdis Kristovskis (UEN, Latvia), Wojciech Roszkowski (UEN, Poland) and György Schöpflin (EPP, Hungary). The draft resolution was worded in a relatively vague and neutral way, and emphasised the importance of “truth, justice and reconciliation” without actually specifying the historical events whose differing interpretations it proposed to reconcile. The draft resolution was soon signed by around fifty MEPs and finally led to the foundation of the Reconciliation of European Histories Group. The other preparatory event for the Prague Process occurred a few months later. In April 2008, the European Public Hearing on Crimes Committed by Totalitarian Regimes was organised by the European Commission and the (conservative) Slovenian government which held the presidency of the Council at that time. The report that it produced made no mention of the idea of European memory, but it treated the crimes committed by Nazism and Stalinism, along with many other regimes such as Italian Fascism or Titoism, on the same page.<sup>392</sup> Together with the fact that the overwhelming majority of the participants consisted of right-wing politicians and intellectuals from the new member states, the hearing was an important milestone of the activism of Eastern European conservative politicians in the matter. The MEPs participating in the hearing were also the same people behind the “United Europe–United History” conference and its draft resolution; they were joined in this event by Kalniete whose views on the “equally evil” totalitarian regimes were mentioned earlier and who became an MEP a year later.

The original intentions behind the formation of the Reconciliation of European Histories Group might have indeed been to create a platform where different views about past events can be represented, confronted and (hopefully) reconciled. In practice, however, the informal group has become a front for what I call the anti-communist group. There are at least two reasons why it is fair to say this. Firstly, the initial draft resolution on the establishment of the “United Europe–United History” working group stated that there is a need “to deal with the most important developments of the European 20<sup>th</sup> century history” because a “comprehensive reassessment of European history will strengthen the European integration.” Without mentioning any particular historical events, this leaves the question of what these “most important developments” are open.

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<sup>392</sup> Peter Jambrek, ed., “Crimes Committed by Totalitarian Regimes: Reports and Proceedings of the 8 April European Public Hearing on ‘Crimes Committed by Totalitarian Regimes’” (Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2008).

On the contrary, the Reconciliation of European Histories Group does not leave so many things up for debate and quite clearly pushes for the wider acknowledgement of Eastern European memories of communism. In its current manifesto, the Group specifies that its aim is to “develop a common approach regarding crimes of totalitarian regimes, inter alia totalitarian communist regime of the USSR, to ensure continuity of the process of evaluation of totalitarian crimes and equal treatment and non-discrimination of victims of all totalitarian regimes.”<sup>393</sup> This is a fine example of how the anti-communist group currently frames its agenda. Instead of calling for the wider recognition of communist crimes and for treating Nazism and communism as comparably or equally evil (which might give the impression in the case of Eastern European actors that they struggle for the recognition of their own victimhood), this passage argues for the equal treatment of the victims of all totalitarian regimes, among whom the victims of communist crimes are only one particular subgroup (rather conspicuously, it is the only one mentioned in the manifesto). Even though the Holocaust is not mentioned here explicitly, this line of thinking subtly challenges its “uniqueness”; if one states that the horrors of the Holocaust were historically unique, it follows that those who suffered from these horrors are also in a unique situation and should be treated in a unique way. This means that treating the victims of the Holocaust in the same way as the victims of other totalitarian crimes would be incompatible with the supposed “uniqueness” of the former. The above outlines a significant change in the rhetoric of the anti-communist group. Initially, they openly framed their argument in relation to the Holocaust; notably when they opposed the proposed Europe-wide ban on the swastika, they stated that paying exclusive attention to the victims of the Holocaust would treat the victims of communist regimes as second-class victims which would in turn constitute an unjustifiable double standard. As this reasoning was vulnerable to the charge that these (mostly) Eastern European politicians simply strived for the acknowledgement of the suffering of their own people, adherents of the anti-communist group shifted to a slightly more abstract language. They began to emphasise the need to develop a common approach to all totalitarian regimes and the non-discrimination of all victims. This shift in framing rendered their rhetoric less overtly “Eastern European” but also vaguer because it left the term “totalitarianism” undefined. If, following the tradition of Hannah Arendt’s seminal work,<sup>394</sup> totalitarianism is interpreted in the narrow sense to refer to Nazism and Stalinism, the new argument of the anti-communist group is actually the old claim in a refurbished form. If we substitute “totalitarianism” with “Nazism and Stalinism” in the new argument, what we get is that “the crimes of Nazism and Stalinism should be judged by the same standards and the victims of

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<sup>393</sup> “Website of the Reconciliation of European Histories Group.” <http://eureconciliation.eu/about/>

<sup>394</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Harvest Book, 1979).

Stalinism should not be discriminated against,” which is actually the old argument. If, on the other hand, one understands totalitarianism more broadly to stand for fascism, communism, religious fundamentalism and a host of other repressive ideologies (as did many of the presenters of the European Public Hearing on Crimes Committed by Totalitarian Regime, for instance), the reframed argument of the anti-communist group is distinct from (and probably even more controversial than) the original one.

The second reason why it is fair to say that the Group has come to effectively function as an anti-communist group is that it is mainly composed of Eastern European conservative MEPs who openly subscribe to such an agenda. As of 31 May 2014, the Group counted forty-one members, only eight of whom were from the old member states and merely five were not conservative politicians (see Table 1). Additionally, thirteen members of the Group are signatories of the Prague Declaration, all of whom are conservative MEPs from the new member states. Even many of those members of the Group who have not signed the Prague Declaration clearly support an anti-communist group agenda; Sandra Kalniete, for instance, is not a signatory, but she famously declared Nazism and communism as equally criminal and is currently the head of the informal group.

Table 1 - The Members of the Reconciliation of European Histories Group (as of 31 May 2014)							
	Surname	Forename	Signatory of the PD?	Political Affiliation	Nationality	Conservative?	Eastern European?
1	KELAM	Tunne	Y	EPP (2004-)	EST	Y	Y
2	LANDSBERGIS	Vytautas	Y	EPP (2004-2014)	LT	Y	Y
3	MACOVEI	Monica Luisa	Y	EPP (2009-)	RO	Y	Y
4	PREDA	Cristian Dan	Y	EPP (2009-)	RO	Y	Y
5	ROITHOVÁ	Zuzana	Y	EPP (2004-2014)	CZ	Y	Y
6	SCHÖPFLIN	György	Y	EPP (2004-)	H	Y	Y
7	STASNY	Peter	Y	EPP (2004-2014)	SK	Y	Y
8	SURJÁN	László	Y	EPP (2004-2014)	H	Y	Y
9	SZÁJER	József	Y	EPP (2004-)	H	Y	Y
10	TÓKÉS	László	Y	NI (2007-2008), Greens/EFA (2008-2009), EPP (2009-)	H	Y	Y
11	UNGUREANU	Traian	Y	EPP (2009-)	RO	Y	Y
12	VAIDERE	Inese	Y	UEN (2004-2009), EPP (2009-)	LV	Y	Y
13	ZVER	Milan	Y	EPP (2009-)	SLO	Y	Y
14	BELDER	Bas		ECR (1999-)	NL	Y	N
15	GÁL	Kinga		EPP (2004-)	H	Y	Y
16	GUTIERREZ-CORTINES	Cristina		EPP (1999-)	E	Y	N
17	HANKISS	Ágnes		EPP (2009-2014)	H	Y	Y
18	HÖKMARK	Gunnar		EPP (2004-)	S	Y	N
19	JÄÄTTEENMÄKI	Anneli		ALDE (2004-)	FIN	N	N
20	JUVIN	Philippe		EPP (2009-)	F	Y	N
21	KALNIETE	Sandra		EPP (2009-)	LV	Y	Y
22	KARINŠ	Arturs Krišjānis		EPP (2009-)	LV	Y	Y
23	KOVATCHEV	Andrey		EPP (2009-)	BG	Y	Y
24	LAMASSOURE	Alain		EPP (1989-1994; 1999-)	F	Y	N
25	MATULA	Iosif		EPP (2009-2014)	RO	Y	Y
26	MIGALSKI	Marek Henryk		ECR (2009-2014)	PL	Y	Y
27	MORKŪNAITĖ- MIKULĖNIENĖ	Radvilė		EPP (2009-2014)	LT	Y	Y
28	NEDELICHEVA	Mariya Ivanova		EPP (2009-)	BG	Y	Y
29	OJULAND	Kristiina		ALDE (2009-2014)	EST	N	Y
30	PADAR	Ivari		SD (2009-2014)	EST	N	Y
31	POSSELT	Bernd		EPP (1994-2014)	D	Y	N
32	PÖTTERING	Hans-Gert		EPP (1979-2014)	D	Y	N
33	ŠADURSKIS	Cristian		EPP (2009-)	RO	Y	Y
34	SARYUSZ-WOLSKI	Jacek		EPP (2004-)	PL	Y	Y
35	SÓGOR	Csaba		EPP (2007-)	RO	Y	Y
36	STOLOJAN	Theodor Dumitru		EPP (2007-)	RO	Y	Y
37	SZYMAŃSKI	Konrad		UEN (2004-2009), ECR (2009-2014)	PL	Y	Y
38	TABAJDI	Csaba		SD (2004-2014)	H	N	Y
39	USPASKICH	Viktor		ALDE (2009-)	LT	N	Y
40	ZÁBORSKÁ	Anna		EPP (2004-)	SK	Y	Y
41	ZALEWSKI	Pawel		EPP (2009-2014)	PL	Y	Y

Source: <http://eureconciliation.eu/about/>

Not surprisingly, the attributes of the typical “anti-communist” described above (Eastern European, conservative, member of the Group, signatory of the Prague Declaration) also fit the profile of the majority of the most important figures behind the RECT (although it must be noted that the Group was formed after the adoption of the RECT). The background of the rapporteurs of the resolution is depicted in Table 2. Half of the sixteen rapporteurs are/were members of the Group and/or signed the Prague Declaration (most often, both). Only a quarter of the rapporteurs were from the old member states and only a quarter of them were not conservative politicians.

This evidence that shows that many of the signatories of the Prague Declaration were also behind the adoption of the RECT supports the observation made earlier about the “shift” in the anti-communist rhetoric that took place around 2008-2009. The Prague Declaration and the preceding years were dominated by efforts that sought the equal treatment of Nazism and communism, and their victims. Beginning with the RECT, however, the new anti-communist narrative advocated a common stance against all types of totalitarianism. What Table 2 shows is that these were not conflicting claims made by different political groups; these claims were made by the same group of politicians who adapted their line of argument to the new circumstances and to the new institutional context.

	Surname	Forename	Signatory of the PD?	Member of the REHG?	Political Affiliation	Nationality	Conservative?	Eastern European?	UEN?
1	KELAM	Tunne	Y	Y	EPP (2004-)	EST	Y	Y	N
2	TÓKÉS	László	Y	Y	NI (2007-2008), Greens/EFA (2008-2009), EPP (2009-)	H	Y	Y	N
3	VAIDERE	Inese	Y	Y	UEN (2004-2009), EPP (2009-)	LV	Y	Y	Y
4	HÖKMARK	Gunnar		Y	EPP (2004-)	S	Y	N	N
5	HYBASKOVA	Jana	Y		EPP (2004-2009)	CZ	Y	Y	N
6	KALLENBACH	Gisela	Y		Greens/EFA (2004-2009)	D	N	N	N
7	KRISTOVSKIS	Girts Valdis	Y	Y*	UEN (2004-2009)	LV	Y	Y	Y
8	ROSZKOWSKI	Wojciech	Y	Y*	UEN (2004-2009)	PL	Y	Y	Y
9	BIELAN	Adam			UEN (2004-2009), ECR (2009-2014)	PL	Y	Y	Y
10	FOLTYN-KUBICKA	Hanna			UEN (2005-2009)	PL	Y	Y	Y
11	HORACEK	Milan			Greens/EFA (2004-2009)	D	N	N	N
12	NEYTS-UYTTEBROECK	Annemie			ALDE (1994-1999; 2004-2014)	B	N	N	N
13	PIOTROWSKI	Mirosław Mariusz			IND/DEM (2004-2006), UEN (2006-2009), ECR (2009-)	PL	Y	Y	Y
14	PODKANSKI	Zdzisław Zbigniew			EPP (2004-2005), UEN (2005-2009)	PL	Y	Y	Y
15	SZENT-IVANYI	István			ALDE (2004-2009)	H	N	Y	N
16	ZILE	Roberts			UEN (2004-2009), ECR (2009-)	LV	Y	Y	Y

\*Member of the “United Europe – United History” working group before losing mandate in 2009.  
Source: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=MOTION&reference=P6-RC-2009-0165&language=EN>

When comparing the proportion of the MEPs from the former communist member states to the total number of MEPs participating in a certain project (for instance, the Group, the RECT or the Platform), we need to bear in mind that the East-West ratio in the European Parliament is far from parity, that the number of total MEPs from the “East” and the “West” is far from equal. As Table 3 demonstrates, the share of MEPs from former communist member states in the EP has fluctuated over time, but it has never been higher than 27 per cent. Therefore, when I say that Eastern European MEPs are disproportionately represented in the Group because they make up more than 80 per cent of its members, it should not be read with the assumption



that their share would normally be 50 per cent, but with the knowledge that it would be less than 27 per cent.

Table 3 - The Number of MEPs from Former Communist Member States at Different Periods						
	2004-2007	2007-2009	2009-2011	2011-2013	2013-2014	2014-
<b>Bulgaria</b>		18	17	18	18	17
<b>Croatia</b>					12	11
<b>Czech Republic</b>	24	24	22	22	22	21
<b>Estonia</b>	6	6	6	6	6	6
<b>Hungary</b>	24	24	22	22	22	21
<b>Latvia</b>	9	9	8	9	9	8
<b>Lithuania</b>	13	13	12	12	12	11
<b>Poland</b>	54	54	50	51	51	51
<b>Romania</b>		35	33	33	33	32
<b>Slovakia</b>	14	14	13	13	13	13
<b>Slovenia</b>	7	7	7	8	8	8
<i>Total Number of MEPs from Former Communist Member States</i>						
	151	204	190	194	206	199
<i>Total Number of MEPs</i>						
	732	785	736	754	766	751
<i>Share of MEPs from Former Communist Member States (%)</i>						
	20.6	26.0	25.8	25.7	26.9	26.5

It is also interesting to see the high number of Eastern European MEPs who were members of the Union for Europe of the Nations Group (UEN) when the resolution was adopted. Half of the rapporteurs came from this Eurosceptic political group which made up only five per cent of the European Parliament. This group regularly rejected political initiatives aimed at deepening European integration but was the main driving force behind the resolution which was a landmark in the “cultural integration” process. Although only the Eastern European members of the group were rapporteurs, the Western European members were also in favour. In order to make sense of this puzzle, we need to look at the complex politics of relations between EU member states and Russia at that time in history. First, it is important to note that in general the more right-wing a political party is in Eastern Europe, the stronger the anti-communist rhetoric is that it uses in front of its respective electorate. Second, many of these parties are more cautious about voicing grievances about the communist past on the European scene and the extent of this caution is a function of their position on Russia. With these two (inevitably oversimplifying) generalisations, it is easier to see the historical context behind, and the reasons for, the adoption of the RECT. First, we need to realise that at that time the UEN was primarily composed of MEPs from Italy, Poland and the Baltic states. The political right in Poland and the Baltic states is exceptional in the sense that it traditionally has a strong and uncompromising anti-Russian stance;

other Eastern European right-wing parties, however, have shown some large fluctuations in this respect. Following the first generalisation, this explains why the far-right in Poland and the Baltic states could so vociferously support the resolution on the European scene, even in the face of threatening Russian opposition. Second, the timing of the adoption of the resolution was also far from accidental; like all political decisions, it required a political coalition at a specific time in history. The fact that the radical claims of the Prague Declaration could mostly be adopted by the EP becomes less surprising once we consider how cold most European states' relations with Russia became after its invasion in Georgia in August 2008. The adoption of the RECT was possible at that particular point in history because most European political forces were willing to face Russia's outrage. There are three important observations that can be made based upon this explanation. First, a particular political group's position on relations with Russia largely influences its support for the pan-European anti-communist agenda. Second, it makes little sense to say that the anti-communist group is also anti-Russian. As I have previously stated, the anti-communist group largely draws from Eastern European right-wing political circles; there are significant differences between how these groups see relations with Russia and these positions always change depending on the larger international political situation. The recent turn of the Hungarian Fidesz to a very pro-Russia position is a case in point. Finally, the history of the idea of European memory in the context of the memory wars is far from a linear progress in a vacuum towards the ever stronger recognition and condemnation of totalitarian crimes. The political support for these policies is always fluctuating and it always depends on the larger developments in international politics.

The Platform of European Memory and Conscience is another important actor in the "European memory debate" that is connected to the Group in numerous ways. The Platform is an international non-governmental organisation whose main goal is to educate and to raise awareness about the crimes committed by totalitarian regimes; it also aims to become a platform for a pan-European network of public and private organisations that already work in this field. The ambition to encourage the commemoration and the education of the crimes of all totalitarian dictatorships (defined by the Platform as "National Socialism, Communism and Fascism" in the context of twentieth century Europe) seems to be in line with the reframed reasoning of the anti-communist group. The founding document of the Platform, however, tries to be less controversial than the manifesto of the Group as it notes "the exceptionality and uniqueness of the Holocaust" in its second paragraph.<sup>395</sup> This is an apparently clear position in the uniqueness-comparability

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<sup>395</sup> "Agreement Establishing the Platform of European Memory and Conscience" (Prague, October 14, 2011), <http://www.memoryandconscience.eu/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Agreement-and-Statute-of-the-Platform1.pdf>.

debate, but its meaning is soon brought into question when the text states that “both National Socialist and Communist dictatorships committed crimes against humanity, war crimes, including crimes against national minorities and genocide” and thus European citizens need to be “informed and educated about [communism] in the same manner as they are educated about National socialism.” As Mälksoo noted, the document is indeed “a curious mix of both claims” of uniqueness and comparability.<sup>396</sup> Let us examine these statements more closely.

- a) a genocide committed by Nazism is exceptional and unique
- b) Nazi and communist dictatorships both committed genocide
- c) both Nazism and communism should be taught in the same manner

The text gives no information about what the genocide committed by communist dictatorships was and whether it was exceptional and unique. If we assumed that it was not, it would be difficult to live up to the standard set by statement c). If there were two genocides, one exceptional and unique and another non-exceptional and non-unique, how would we be supposed to teach them in the same manner? Surely, we would need to handle the former in a special way by virtue of its exceptionality and uniqueness. Therefore, if we are to keep the above three statements internally consistent, we should assume that the genocide committed by communist dictatorships is also exceptional and unique. What is more, it needs to be as exceptional and unique as the Holocaust if the two are to be taught in the same manner. If we consider that it is generally argued that the Holocaust is unique because of its “radical evilness” and that the Platform implicitly assumes that the Holocaust and the communist genocide are equally exceptional and unique, we must come to the conclusion that, according to the Platform, Nazism and communism are equally evil. While the founding document of the Platform first appears to be less controversial than the manifesto of the Group, the arguments put forth by the former logically lead to the core claim of the anti-communist group.

The Platform can be regarded as an anti-communist group for three more reasons. First, the composition of the Platform follows a pattern that is similar to that of the Group in that it is dominated by Eastern European conservatives. Out of the twenty-five representatives of the Platform,<sup>397</sup> twenty are from the new member states (see Table 4). Fifteen of the representatives held and/or still hold political positions, which makes their affiliation relatively clearly identifiable, and only two of them were not affiliated with a right-wing political party. There is also a very

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<sup>396</sup> Maria Mälksoo, “Criminalizing Communism: Transnational Mnemopolitics in Europe,” *International Political Sociology* 8, no. 1 (2014): 90.

<sup>397</sup> I understand representative in a broad sense here standing for the President, the Managing Director, and the members of the Executive Board, the Supervisory Board and the Board of Trustees.

significant overlap between the people involved in the work of the Platform and the Group, and the signatories of the Prague Declaration. Fourteen out of the twenty-five representatives of the Platform are/were members of the Group and/or signatories of the Prague Declaration. The few Western European members of the Platform are also more widely known for their strong positions on communism than for voicing their views about other totalitarian systems. As mentioned above, the president of the Platform is Göran Lindblad, the rapporteur of the PACE resolution on totalitarian communist regimes. One of the members of the Board of Trustees is Stéphane Courtois, the French historian who edited *The Black Book of Communism*, but the Platform cannot boast of a comparably influential expert on any other totalitarian regime.

	Surname	Forename	Signatory of the PD?	Member of the REHG?	Political Affiliation	Nationality	Conservative?	Eastern European?
1	KELAM	Tunne	Y	Y	EPP (2004-)	EST	Y	Y
2	LANDSBERGIS	Vytautas	Y	Y	EPP (2004-2014)	LT	Y	Y
3	MACOVEI	Monica Luisa	Y	Y	EPP (2009-)	RO	Y	Y
4	TÓKÉS	László	Y	Y	NI (2007-2008), Greens/EFA (2008-2009), EPP (2009-)	H	Y	Y
5	ZVER	Milan	Y	Y	EPP (2009-)	SLO	Y	Y
6	ROSZKOWSKI	Wojciech	Y	Y*	UEN (2004-2009)	PL	Y	Y
7	JANSA	Janez	Y		conservative PM (2004-2008; 2012-2013)	SLO	Y	Y
8	LEHKY	Miroslav	Y			SK	NA	Y
9	LINDBLAD	Göran	Y		conservative MP (1997-2010)	S	Y	N
10	MAJSTRÍK	Martin	Y		independent senator (2002-2008)	CZ	N	Y
11	SZILÁGYI	Zsolt	Y		assistant (2007-) of MEP László Tőkés (EPP)	RO	Y	Y
12	WINKELMANN	Neela	Y			CZ	NA	Y
13	KALNIETE	Sandra		Y	EPP (2009-)	LV	Y	Y
14	MORKŪNAITĒ-MIKULĒNIENĒ	Radvilē		Y	EPP (2009-2014)	LT	Y	Y
15	APPLEBAUM	Anne				US/PL	NA	NA
16	COURTOIS	Stéphane				F	NA	N
17	HIIO	Toomas				EST	NA	Y
18	KOWAL	Paweł Robert			ECR (2009-2014)	PL	Y	Y
19	MUTOR	Marek				PL	NA	Y
20	NOLLENDORFS	Valters				LV	NA	Y
21	REIPRICH	Siegfried				D	NA	N
22	SCHULZ	Werner			Greens/EFA (2009-2014)	D	N	N
23	UKIELSKI	Paweł				PL	NA	Y
24	VETCHY	Ondřej				CZ	NA	Y
25	VONDRA	Alexandr			conservative senator (2006-2012)	CZ	Y	Y

\*Member of the “United Europe – United History” working group before losing mandate in 2009.  
Source: <http://www.memoryandconscience.eu/2011/10/26/representatives-of-the-platform/>

Secondly, the actual activities of the Platform are more concerned with the crimes of communism than those of other totalitarian regimes. The very first conference that it organised bore the title “Crimes of the Communist Regimes” in February 2010. In recent years, the Platform has hosted two conferences in the EP in co-operation with the Group on this theme: the “Legal

Settlement of Communist Crimes” in June 2012 and the “Justice 2.0: International Justice for the Communist Crimes” in May 2015. The latter was also officially supported by the EPP Group. To be fair, the Platform does have some projects that deal with totalitarianism in general<sup>398</sup> but there has not been any that would have dealt solely with Nazism and/or the Holocaust; given that the two largest events organised by the Platform were devoted only to the crimes of communism, this is at odds with its proclaimed ambition to promote the commemoration and the education of the crimes of all totalitarian regimes.

Thirdly, the circumstances of the establishment of the Platform also tell us a lot about its orientation. The idea of such an organisation was raised during the European Public Hearing on Crimes Committed by Totalitarian Regimes and was subsequently supported by the Prague Declaration and the EP resolution of 2009. In preparation for the Presidency of the Council, the Czech government invited all member states to a meeting in November 2008 where the working group on the Platform of European Memory and Conscience was formed. Subsequently, although the EP also called for “the establishment of a Platform of European Memory and Conscience to provide support for networking and cooperation among national research institutes specialising in the subject of totalitarian history,” it did not take any concrete measures in this direction. In February 2010, the aforementioned working group organised the conference “Crimes of the Communist Regimes” where the “Declaration on Crimes of Communism” was adopted by almost the same people who were behind the Prague Declaration. In August 2011, important government officials from several member states—the most prominent of whom was Jerzy Buzek (EPP, Poland), President of the EP at that time—signed the Warsaw Declaration which practically restated the demands of the Prague Declaration and hastened the implementation of the plans for the Platform. It was only founded as late as October 2011, two and a half years after the EP resolution, thanks to the activism of Donald Tusk, then Prime Minister of Poland which held the presidency of the Council in the second half of 2011. The Platform was officially established during the summit of the Prime ministers of the Visegrad group (all conservative politicians) with funds provided by the International Visegrad Fund. Among the nineteen founding institutions, those from Eastern European member states were largely over-represented as only five organisations were from the West (three from Germany, one from the Netherlands and one from Sweden). The number of member institutions has since risen to forty-eight, but only four of the new members were from the old EU member states.

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<sup>398</sup> The travelling exhibition “Totalitarianism in Europe,” the conference “Legacy of Totalitarianism Today” in June 2014 and the reader for secondary school students “Lest We Forget: Memory of Totalitarianism in Europe.”

It is worth noting that whenever an Eastern European country holds the presidency, something important happens in the pan-European commemoration of the victims of totalitarianisms, usually with an (explicit or implicit) emphasis on the crimes of communist regimes. In 2008, the Slovenian presidency pushed for the European Public Hearing on Crimes Committed by Totalitarian Regimes where most presenters were Eastern European conservatives who unsurprisingly talked about communism most of the time. The EP resolution of 2009 was adopted during the Czech presidency while the establishment of the Platform was made possible by the work of the Hungarian and Polish presidencies of 2011. When it was Lithuania's turn, the presidency hosted the conference "Totalitarian Regimes' Heritage in Hate Crimes" in October 2013; the keynote address was given by Kalnietė; the managing director of the Platform, Neela Winkelmann, talked about the killings committed by the border guards of communist regimes along the Iron Curtain; the final speech was given by another member of the Reconciliation of European Histories Group and of the Board of Trustees of the Platform, Radvilė Morkūnaitė-Mikulėnienė.

All this is not to say that the Group and the Platform were established with the intention to function as anti-communist groups. The original motivation may well have been (and may still be) to initiate debate between people of diverse views. What is clear, however, is that these institutions do not currently function in this manner; the people involved are almost exclusively Eastern European conservatives with an "anti-communist" agenda and the work that the Group and the Platform do is also in this line.

Finally, it is worth noting how keen the adherents of the anti-communist group are to spell Nazi out as National Socialist. This serves a double function: on the one hand, it emphasises that Nazism and communism stem from the same root and are thus comparably/equally evil; on the other hand, this framing pushes the responsibility for both totalitarian ideologies to the radical left. In the light of this, it is not surprising that the most vociferous opponents of the anti-communist agenda are members of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) Group, the Western European "far left," who could not be further on the political spectrum from the Eastern European conservatives dominating the anti-communist group. In the parliamentary debate of the RECT, the members of this political group were among the strongest critics of the text. When the Committee on Culture and Education of the EP debated the Commission's proposal for the second edition of the Europe for Citizens programme, the members of the GUE/NGL issued a minority opinion that went as far as criticising the programme for telling future generations "the historical lie that seeks to put Communists on a par with Nazis." They even criticised the concept of European memory directly, considering it "an ambiguous term that

goes beyond the ‘duty of remembrance’ in respect of the victims of totalitarian regimes.”<sup>399</sup> Finally, the GUE/NGL felt that the Europe for Citizens programme, by putting too much emphasis on Nazism and Stalinism, encourages forgetfulness about “both the Fascist dictatorships that once held sway in southern Europe and the colonial past” and thus promotes a “biased view of history.” Recalling the importance of commemorating fascism and colonialism is understandable from the perspective of this left-wing political group. What is less clear is why the members of the GUE/NGL accused the proposals of the second edition of the Europe for Citizens programme of forgetfulness about fascism whereas it was already implicitly included as a legitimate theme in the Commission’s original proposal,<sup>400</sup> and was explicitly mentioned in the proposal of the Committee to which the GUE/NGL added its dissenting opinion.<sup>401</sup> Nevertheless, the minority opinion did make a good point about colonialism which is conspicuously absent from every aspect of European memory politics.

Despite this opposition, the new “edition” of the Europe for Citizens programme for the period 2014-2020 visibly moved in the direction of the anti-communist agenda. One of the two new strands is called “European remembrance.” The scope of the programme has been significantly expanded as it can now fund initiatives that reflect on any of the “totalitarian regimes in Europe’s modern history (especially but not exclusively Nazism which led to the Holocaust, Fascism, Stalinism and totalitarian communist regimes).”<sup>402</sup> The most striking developments are that the commemoration of the Holocaust and Nazism here does not have the special status that it enjoyed in the first edition of the project, and that the original narrow focus on Stalinism has been replaced by “Stalinism and totalitarian communist regimes.” By calling for the remembrance of all totalitarianisms, the Europe for Citizens programme of 2014-2020 has clearly adopted one of the main arguments of the anti-communist group. What is more, the project has become open-ended to such an extent that it can now even encompass “activities concerning other defining moments and reference points in recent European history.”<sup>403</sup> Naturally, it remains to be seen whether this different wording of strategic plans will actually mean that the winning applications will be more diverse than in the first edition of the Europe for Citizens programme, whether the

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<sup>399</sup> Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament, “Report on the Proposal for a Council Regulation Establishing for the Period 2014-2020 the Programme ‘Europe for Citizens,’” December 11, 2012, 49.

<sup>400</sup> The scope of the programme initially proposed by the Commission was “totalitarian regimes in Europe’s modern history (especially but not exclusively Nazism and Stalinism).” Ibid., 32.

<sup>401</sup> The Committee proposed to expand the scope to “all the dictatorships in Europe’s modern history, such as Nazism, Fascism and totalitarian communist regimes including Stalinism.” Ibid., 23.

<sup>402</sup> Council of the European Union, “Regulation No 390/2014 Establishing the ‘Europe for Citizens’ Programme for the Period 2014-2020,” April 14, 2014.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

number of funded programmes that focus on Nazism, on the one hand, and Stalinism and other totalitarian regimes, on the other, will be more balanced.

What can be safely deduced from the current trends, however, is that “European remembrance” has gained importance within the Europe for Citizens programme compared to its previous edition. Importantly, the number of themes has been reduced from four to two; while the other “actions” of the first edition of the programme have been classed together in the new catch-all “Democratic engagement and civic participation” strand, “European remembrance” has remained a theme on its own with a greatly enlarged scope. Additionally, it receives more funding than in the first edition of the programme, both in relative and absolute terms. Its share of the total budget increased from 4 per cent to 20 per cent while the aggregate amount earmarked for the Europe for Citizens programme has only been partially reduced, from €215m to €185m.<sup>404</sup>

### **House of European History**

The latest major development in the European memory debate is the museum called the House of European History (HEH). Although numerous previous cultural projects have been devoted to European history and to the history of European integration, what makes the HEH stand out is that it is the first museum project whose conception is explicitly based on the idea of European memory. In the following, I will depict the historical context within which it arose.

Several scholars date the beginnings of the interest in giving a European perspective to museums to the late 1970s.<sup>405</sup> In 1977, the European Commission encouraged the addition of “European rooms” to already existing national museums. This idea did not succeed as a sole such room was opened in Norwich in 1980. The first plans of museums entirely dedicated to represent certain aspects of European history only arose in the mid-1980s. The timing is not surprising if we consider that this period is often considered to be the beginning of the “memory boom” and a time of renewed impetus for the European project. It must be noted, however, that calls for extending Europeanisation to the cultural realm were made a decade earlier with the aforementioned Copenhagen Declaration on European Identity of 1973, and that a central theme of the Tindemans Report of 1975 was how to boost the legitimacy of European institutions and

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<sup>404</sup> European Parliament and Council of the European Union, “Decision No 1904/2006/EC Establishing for the Period 2007 to 2013 the Programme ‘Europe for Citizens’ to Promote Active European Citizenship”; Council of the European Union, “Regulation No 390/2014 Establishing the ‘Europe for Citizens’ Programme for the Period 2014-2020.”

<sup>405</sup> Véronique Charléty, “L’invention du Musée de l’Europe: Contribution à l’analyse des politiques symboliques européennes,” *Regards sociologiques*, no. 27–28 (2004): 149–66; Taja Vovk van Gaal and Christine Dupont, “The House of European History,” in *Entering the Minefields: The Creation of New History Museums in Europe* (EuNaMus, European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past, and the European Citizen, Brussels: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2012), 43–53, <http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp/083/ecp12083.pdf>.



establish a link between the EU and “the people.” These goals were endorsed by several museum projects initiated in the ‘80s and ‘90s. An extended analysis of the “museums of Europe” by Camille Mazé revealed that they aimed to reinforce European identity, and thus support the legitimacy of the EU, similarly to the way national museums tried to uphold (and more often than not still try to uphold) national identity and political legitimacy.<sup>406</sup> Many of these plans came to realisation, such as the short-lived Museum of Europe (opened in 2007 as Musée de l’Europe in Brussels), the European Museum Schengen (opened in 2010), the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations (opened in 2013 as Musée des civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée in Marseille) and the Lieu d’Europe (opened in 2014 in Strasbourg); and some of them were dropped, for instance the Museum of the Union (Luxembourg), the Museum for Europe (Museion per l’Europa, Turin) and the Bauhaus Europa (Aachen). Mazé observed that these projects were overwhelmingly operated from “below.” The initiative and the funding came mostly from private individuals and, to a lesser extent, from municipalities and regional authorities; the role of national, let alone supranational, actors was very limited.

The idea of an EU-backed museum already emerged towards the end of the Cold War and political steps were taken in the early 1990s. A group of historians, chaired by Krzysztof Pomian, was commissioned to work on its conception, but the project was postponed several times.<sup>407</sup> It was only in 2011 that the Parlamentarium, the first truly “top-down” project which represented historical events from a European perspective, opened. It is the visitors’ centre of the European Parliament, a supranational initiative whose aim is to bring the institution closer to “the people.” Its middle level houses an exhibition of the history of European integration that begins with the Second World War and ends in the present day. The integration process is portrayed as a sometimes slower, sometimes faster, but overall rather continuous progress. The exhibition thus wedded the “Europe out of war” and Holocaust narratives with the “progress of European integration” narrative.

The most recent addition to this list will be the House of European History (scheduled to open in May 2017) which stands out from the crowd for a number of reasons. Similarly to the Parlamentarium, it is a supranational initiative, established and funded by the EP. Contrary to the Parlamentarium, the HEH is clearly defined as a museum project and it is entirely dedicated to the representation of European history. Moreover, and more importantly for my research interest, its latest conception explicitly envisages a “reservoir of European memory.” It is because of this last

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<sup>406</sup> Camille Mazé, “Des usages politiques du musée à l’échelle européenne.” Note that legitimacy is understood here very narrow-mindedly as popular support.

<sup>407</sup> Assmann, “Europe’s Divided Memory,” 25.

unique feature that the HEH has an important role to play in my analysis of the development of the idea of European memory.

It must be noted that the concept of European memory has only recently become central to the conception of the HEH. The idea of the HEH entered mainstream debates when Hans-Gert Pöttering was elected the President of the European Parliament and called for its establishment in his inaugural speech in February 2007:

I should like to create a locus for history and for the future where the concept of the European idea can continue to grow. I would like to suggest the founding of a “House of European History.” It should [be] a place where **a memory of European history** and the work of European unification is jointly cultivated, and which at the same time is available as a locus for the **European identity** to go on being shaped by present and future citizens of the European Union.<sup>408</sup>

In a single and singularly confusing sentence, Pöttering condensed three core concepts around which the proposed museum was to be organised: European memory, European history (more precisely, “a memory of European history,” whatever that may be) and European identity. As the project slowly took shape, however, what we may call the “European history” aspect became dominant.

Pöttering was an MEP of the EPP group from the first European parliamentary elections of 1979 to the most recent elections of 2014. Between 2007 and 2009, he was the President of the EP and it was in this quality that he initiated the House of European History project. He was also one of the few Western European members of the aforementioned Reconciliation of European Histories Group. While he did not go as far as Sandra Kalniete, the chair of the Group who directly compared and equated the evilness of Nazism and Stalinism, Pöttering did speak highly of the “great Jewish political scientist” Hannah Arendt who, in his interpretation, developed scientific criteria based upon which she established that “both totalitarian systems are comparable and terrible.”<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> Committee of Experts, “Conceptual Basis for a House of European History” (Brussels, October 2008), 4, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004\\_2009/documents/dv/745/745721/745721\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/745/745721/745721_en.pdf). Emphasis added.

<sup>409</sup> Baltic News Service, “Baltic States Opened Western Europe’s Eyes on Soviet Union Totalitarianism,” April 28, 2009, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110722150204/http://www.euro.lt/en/news/lithuanias-membership-in-the-eu/news/5537/?print=1>.

Following Pöttering's public commitment to the project, the Bureau of the European Parliament entrusted a Committee of Experts in late 2007 with the task to work out the general conception of the museum.<sup>410</sup> The nine-member committee was mainly composed of historians<sup>411</sup> which might explain the historical "bias" of the resulting report, entitled *Conceptual Basis for a House of European History* and completed in October 2008. The *Conceptual Basis* envisaged a rather traditional history museum, a "modern exhibition, documentation and information centre" with a "chronologically based narrative [that] will help the likely target group to understand historical events and processes."<sup>412</sup> In more than half of the report, the authors described what topics and historical events the future museum should give information about. It becomes clear from this lengthy prescription that what should be represented is European history in the (geographically and temporally) broadest possible sense, from the origins of civilisation to the future of Europe. However, apart from quoting Pöttering's speech mentioned above, the document did not make any mention about memory or identity.

In 2009, the decision was made about the location of the HEH; it was to be housed in the European Quarter in Brussels, in the Eastman building of Leopold Park. The renovation of the building started in 2012. Although the opening of the museum was originally planned to be in 2014, works are still ongoing at the time of writing and the current plans foresee the opening of the HEH only in May 2017.

The Academic Project Team was put together in early 2011 with the mandate to work out the details of the museum project and to oversee the implementation process. It is advised by the Academic Committee. Under this team, which is considerably larger than the Committee of Experts and includes people from more diverse backgrounds, the conception of the museum changed significantly. After the initial dominance of a purely "historical" approach, the concepts of memory and identity slowly gained prominence. The nature of this conceptual shift will be analysed in detail in the next chapter.

The political actors behind the HEH are quite different from those discussed so far (the anti-communist group and its far-left counterparts). The two political bodies of the museum are the Bureau Contact Group, which oversaw the initial stages of the project, and the Board of Trustees, which currently supervises the implementation of the plan in an advisory capacity. The former was chaired by Miguel Angel Martínez Martínez (SD, Spain) while the latter is chaired by

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<sup>410</sup> Vovk van Gaal and Dupont, "The House of European History."

<sup>411</sup> Giorgio Cracco, António Reis, Mária Schmidt, Włodzimierz Borodziej, Hans Walter Hütter, Marie-Hélène Joly, Matti Kling, Michel Dumoulin, Ronald de Leeuw.

<sup>412</sup> Committee of Experts, "Conceptual Basis for a House of European History," 7.

Pöttering, both of whom are regarded by the Academic Project Team as the “political ‘godfathers’ to the project.”<sup>413</sup> As Table 5 demonstrates, the Bureau and the Board have a composition that is significantly different from that of the Group or the Platform. With seven conservative and ten non-conservative members, and with a conservative and a socialist “godfather,” the bodies are rather politically balanced. Only three of the twenty-one members (14.29 per cent) are from Eastern European member states which means that this time they are actually underrepresented. One of these Eastern European members, Włodzimierz Borodziej, is not a politician but a historian who also chairs the Academic Committee. There is only one member who is a “typical” member of the anti-communist group, Roszkowski Wojciech, who was an Eastern European conservative MEP, signatory of the Prague Declaration, representative of the Platform and was a Member of the “United Europe–United History” working group, the predecessor of the REHG. Apart from him, only two other members of these bodies are active in the Group, Alain Lamassoure and Pöttering. In the light of this, it is understandable why Schöpflin told me in an interview that the Group did not have much word in the development of the project; they tried to make an input when the idea of the HEH first emerged, but they felt that it had not really been taken into consideration.

	Surname	Forename	Member of the HEH Bureau?	Member of the HEH Board?	Signatory of the PD?	Member of the REHG?	Representative of the PEMC?	Political Affiliation	Nationality	Conservative?	Eastern European?
1	MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ	Miguel Angel	Y	Y				SD (1999-2014)	E	N	N
2	ANGELILLI	Roberta	Y					NI (1994-1999), UEN (1999-2009), EPP (2009-2014)	I	Y	N
3	DURANT	Isabelle	Y					Greens/EFA (2009-2014)	B	N	N
4	LIBERADZKI	Bogusław	Y					SD (2004-)	PL	N	Y
5	PAPASTAMKOS	Georgios	Y					EPP (2004-2014)	GR	Y	N
6	PTITTELLA	Gianni	Y					SD (1999-)	I	N	N
7	VIDAL-QUADRAS	Alejo	Y					EPP (1999-2014)	E	Y	N
8	BORODZIEJ	Włodzimierz		Y					PL	NA	Y
9	DAVIGNON	Étienne		Y					B	NA	N
10	HÜTTER	Hans Walter		Y					D	NA	N
11	LAMASSOURE	Alain		Y		Y		EPP (1989-1994; 1999-)	F	Y	N
12	ONESTA	Gérard		Y				Greens/EFA (1991-1994, 1999-2009)	F	N	N
13	PACK	Doris Gisela		Y				EPP (1989-2014)	D	Y	N
14	PALIADELI	Chrysoula		Y				SD (2009-2014)	GR	N	N
15	PICQUE	Charles		Y				Socialist Party (Belgium)	B	N	N
16	PÖTTERING	Hans-Gert		Y		Y		EPP (1979-2014)	D	Y	N
17	ROSZKOWSKI	Wojciech		Y	Y	Y*	Y	UEN (2004-2009)	PL	Y	Y
18	SUTHERLAND	Peter		Y					IRL	NA	N
19	VASSILIOU	Androulla		Y				United Democrats (Cyprus)	CY	N	N
20	WALLIS	Diana		Y				ALDE (1999-2012)	GB	N	N
21	WURTZ	Francis		Y				GUE/NGL (1979-2009)	F	N	N

\*Member of the “United Europe – United History” working group before losing mandate in 2009.  
Source: European Parliament Directorate-General for Communication, “Building a House of European History.”

<sup>413</sup> Vovk van Gaal and Dupont, “The House of European History,” 47.

In the press, the HEH has not yet received significant attention, but when it does, it is routinely depicted by British newspapers as yet another expensive European vanity project whose only function will be to disseminate federalist propaganda. In the next chapter, remaining agnostic with respect to the costs of the project and the question of utility, I will only be interested in how the conception of the museum imagines European memory.

In conclusion, the term “European memory” has not been extensively used until the Prague Declaration in 2008 whose agenda was largely absorbed by the EP a year later. Since then, the popularity of the idea of European memory has increased exponentially; it has become a key concept in the European memory debate, and European institutions have become the main fora in which the idea of European memory has been discussed. Having introduced the historical context of the term, in the next chapter I will explore and critically evaluate how the idea of European memory is used and understood in five institutions: the European Parliament, the Reconciliation of European Histories Group, the Platform of European Memory and Conscience, the Europe for Citizens programme and the House of European History.



# 7

## European Institutions and the Idea of European Memory

In the previous chapter, I gave a general overview of how the idea of European memory developed over time, and I identified the main actors and fora in this process. Specifically, I concentrated on how the idea can be situated in the context of the European memory wars. In this chapter, I examine the concept itself more closely; I look at each of the five most important institutions in turn and I critically analyse how different actors conceptualised European memory. The European institutions that I am concerned with are the European Parliament, which has adopted a number of resolutions with reference to European memory in the last decade, three projects that are closely related to the EP (the Reconciliation of European Histories Group, the Platform of European Memory and Conscience and the House of European History), and the Europe for Citizens programme of the European Commission. As previously, I will not consider important projects which do not explicitly mention European memory as one of their main concepts, such as the New Narrative for Europe or the European Cultural Routes initiatives.

### European Parliament

As I explained in the previous chapter, I consider the year 2005 to be an important turning point in discussions about the past at the European level because this tumultuous time was at the crossing point of several overlapping and interconnected trends. Just as the intellectual battle for European inheritance that characterised the preceding years was temporarily won by the alliance of the Classical and Enlightenment visions of Europe against the Christian perspective, the whole debate started to diminish in importance.<sup>414</sup> As attention turned once again to more recent, mostly post-war, events, discussions about more ancient history were quickly relegated to a secondary status. The “Europe out of war” story made a comeback coupled with a powerful Holocaust narrative whose commemoration had only recently acquired a transnational (and even

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<sup>414</sup> This is not to say that the concept of European inheritance or the vision of Christian Europe are not important anymore. The European Cultural Routes project of the Council of Europe, for example, is built around the idea of European heritage. The currently much more prominent debate about Europe’s recent past, however, is centred around the idea of European memory and is very rarely concerned with Christianity.

international) standing. However, just when the Holocaust seemed to offer a consensual and indisputable founding memory for Europe, its dominance began to be questioned by an emerging anti-communist block. The idea of European memory was not yet in frequent use, but it was already mentioned in these early stages of the European memory wars in two resolutions adopted by the EP in 2005; not surprisingly, one primarily emphasised the victims of the Holocaust, while the other focused on the fight against communism.

The resolution on the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe (RWW2), where the idea of European memory first appeared in official EP documents, can be considered as the finest example of the “Europe out of war”-cum-Holocaust narrative. It portrayed the war as primarily a “war against Nazism and fascism” and argued for the need to commemorate the victims of this “common European tragedy ... in particular all the victims of the Holocaust.” The RWW2 did not only reject and condemn Holocaust denial, but also considered “revisionist views ... as shameful and contrary to historical truth,” implying that an undisputable morally right reading of the Holocaust is already at our disposal. Additionally, as described in the previous chapter, the resolution did contain recognition of the crimes committed by the Soviet Union, but this was very limited and vague. With respect to the more abstract question of remembrance, the resolution relied on the vocabulary duty-based moral philosophical accounts. It highlighted “the importance of keeping the memories of the past alive, because there cannot be reconciliation without truth and remembrance,” and of “overcoming the atrocities of the past.” The way the resolution talks about memories and truth in the singular seems to suggest that the historical truth and the memories of the past are realities that exist “out there.” In the context of duty-based ethical approaches to the public representation of past events, I called these the historical truth and the collective memory assumptions. Similarly to duty-based accounts, the resolution rejects the “closing the books” approach to the past when it argues for the need to keep the memories alive, considering this as the only way toward future reconciliation. However, the following passage, which contains the first use of the idea of European memory in official EU documents, complicates the easy classification of the resolution as a text working within a standard duty-based moral philosophy framework.



The European Parliament ... [w]elcomes this first opportunity to commemorate the anniversary with elected Members from all 25 Member States as an expression of the ever closer union of our nations and citizens, who have overcome the divisions between aggressors and victims and between victors and the defeated, an occasion to share and combine our remembrances on the way to a truly **common European memory** and an opportunity to prevent recurrences of nationalism and totalitarian rule.<sup>415</sup>

In this part, remembering in national contexts is depicted with the standard mnemonic community and collective memory assumptions; the use of the first person possessive (“our nations and citizens” and “our remembrances”) evokes the image of pre-existing national mnemonic communities with their pre-existing memories. Although it is never explicitly specified in the resolution that memories and remembrances should be understood to be those of national communities, the spirit of the text strongly suggests this: the resolution never talks about social groups and minorities, but refers to nations and countries almost once in every clause. When it comes to the idea of European memory, however, the text departs from mainstream moral philosophy assumptions significantly. European memory is not presented as a memory that has prior existence, but as something that needs to be developed (we are “on the way” to it). Similarly, the mnemonic community is not yet formed; more precisely, a community exists (sufficiently clearly delineated as the then twenty-five member states) but it does not yet do the remembering together, it has not yet acquired a mnemonic dimension. Therefore, the mental frame conjured up by the resolution is that national communities and their national memories exist, and a European community, which has been formed by national communities coming together, needs to acquire a mnemonic dimension by combining the memories of these constituent national communities into a common European memory. Consequently, this conception of European memory does have a transnational dimension, as it considers the “common European memory” somewhat distinct from national ones; nevertheless, this transnational standing is very weak, as the European memory is not only highly dependent on national memories, but it is effectively composed by them. The term “European memory” does not stand here for more than a combination of national memories which means that it is only slightly more transnational than the commonsensical “national memories in Europe” understanding of the concept. Furthermore, the resolution does not consider the possibility of conflict between nationally specific interpretations of past events. The vision of a harmonious process of “sharing and combining” memories can only be conceived, however, if a certain authoritative reading of the past is assumed to always prevail in the case of potential disagreements, or if there are no disagreements between national accounts of the past as they all already conform to this historical truth. If such a historical truth exists, as posited by the

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<sup>415</sup> Emphasis added.

passage of the resolution mentioned above, then it is not clear why it needs to be created and combined on the basis of national memories. If we assume that the resolution is internally logically consistent to a certain extent, the only plausible explanation for this is that it considered European memory as a collection of selected and combined historically true statements, each of which already exist in national contexts.

The resolution adopted on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Solidarity later in 2005 followed this line of thought. It stated that in order to commemorate the effort of Polish workers and of “all people of central and eastern Europe who fought for human rights, freedom, solidarity and the unity of Europe ... and to place it in the **collective memory of Europe**, 31 August is to be celebrated as the Day of Freedom and Solidarity.”<sup>416</sup> The resolution thus called for a memory of primarily national importance, the signing of the Gdańsk Accords on 31 August 1980, to be given a place in the European memory “pantheon.”

After these two texts, the idea of European memory was not mentioned in official EP documents until the crucially important Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism adopted in April 2009 (RECT). Similarly to the resolution on the end of the Second World War, this resolution upheld the importance of keeping the memories of Europe’s past alive so as to “lay the foundations for reconciliation based on truth and remembrance.” It also argued that Europe needs to “form a common view of its history” if it is to be united. The resolution is not clear about how this common view of history should be created, but it does specify that the subject of this common view should be totalitarian political systems in general (defined as “Nazism, Stalinism and fascist and Communist regimes”) which should be recognised “as a common legacy.” In this respect, the RECT significantly departs from the resolutions of 2005. In the latter, the common European memory stood for a combination of (mostly) national narratives; it was envisaged to be composed of national memory building blocks. The underlying logic here is very simple: “I accept your memory as a memory that is partly mine as well.” To say that Europe needs to “form a common view” of a historical issue, however, is a different matter. By using this language, the RECT implies that Europe needs to work towards a single, unified, consensual historical account of totalitarian regimes. The idea that “we should discuss and agree on what totalitarianism means to us” requires much more interaction from participants than the “let us put our memories together” plan. To form a common view, to seek a consensus about a historical issue already implies a dynamic relationship between the actors whose initial conceptions might very well change in the process. Consequently, this vision accords greater autonomy to a transnational European

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<sup>416</sup> Emphasis added.

memory than previous ones because it is not said to be a simple collection of pre-existing and unchanging national memories, but a consensual narrative about totalitarianisms. In order to achieve this, the RECT did not only call on member states and European institutions to work towards such “an honest and thorough debate” about the crimes of totalitarian regimes, but also proposed the institutional framework within which such a debate could unfold. It urged the “establishment of a Platform of European Memory and Conscience to provide support for networking and cooperation among national research institutes specialising in the subject of totalitarian history”; the resolution even envisaged “the creation of a pan-European documentation centre/memorial for the victims of all totalitarian regimes.” Although the latter has not yet been created, the nature of the initiative contributed to the transnational character of the European memory conceived in the resolution.

As the short excerpts from the resolution and the short description of the plan of the Platform reveal, the RECT decisively turned to a victim-oriented memory politics with respect to the subject matter of remembrance. This stands in contrast to the resolutions of 2005 which concentrated on the uplifting human experiences that followed long periods of repression and suffering; specifically, they recalled the stories about how European unity was born after the tragedy of the war and the Holocaust, and how brave Eastern European freedom-fighters prevailed after decades of hardship. While the RECT did have some forward-looking aspects, while it did mention that European unity and reconciliation might be strengthened by a common approach to the past, it clearly put the emphasis on remembering the horrors of totalitarian regimes and those who suffered because of them. At one point, nevertheless, the resolution departs from a narrow focus on totalitarianisms and their victims; it significantly widens the scope of past events about which a common European view can or should be formed when it calls for “a comprehensive reassessment of European history and Europe-wide recognition of all historical aspects of modern Europe.”

While the RECT was arguably a landmark text in the development of European memory politics, to assume that it elucidates (or that it even intends to elucidate) a relatively coherent conception of European memory would be a mistake, especially if we consider the resolution’s numerous internal contradictions. The most glaring of these problems concerns the status of “memories.” The resolution highlighted “the importance of keeping the memories of the past alive” and recommended the “appropriate preservation of historical memory.” Talking about memory as something that needs to be preserved and kept alive conjures up the image of an endangered species; here, memory is portrayed as a precious “thing” that can be either preserved with care in its current form or left on its own to perish. In other parts of the text, however,

memory is not presented as something essentially unchangeable that is either given “out there” or not existing anymore. Much like in the thick version of the Europeanist scholarly conception, European memory is considered by the RECT to be the result of negotiation and consensus, a discursive reality that can be constructed from scratch; as such, it has no fixed form. This is not new since we have seen that the RWW2 of 2005 already treated European memory as belonging to an ontological order that is different from national memories. However, by imagining European memory not as a combination of primordial national memories but essentially as a compromise reached on the basis of national narratives, the RECT implies the possibility (indeed, the necessity) of national memories changing in the process of deliberation on a consensual “common view” of history. By implicitly suggesting that national memories might also be malleable to a certain extent, the RECT differs significantly from the earlier resolutions; this conception, on the other hand, is in tension with the “endangered species in need of preservation” image of memory that is prevalent in the other parts of the text of the RECT.

Finally, the resolution begins with an interesting proviso that tries to explain the role of history as an academic discipline and the responsibility of political bodies in this domain. Naturally, it would be difficult to say anything meaningful about these big questions in the short and condensed format of an EP resolution, but the problem is that these clauses cause more confusion than clarity.

A. whereas historians agree that fully objective interpretations of historical facts are not possible and objective historical narratives do not exist; whereas, nevertheless, professional historians use scientific tools to study the past, and try to be as impartial as possible,

B. whereas no political body or political party has a monopoly on interpreting history, and such bodies and parties cannot claim to be objective,

C. whereas official political interpretations of historical facts should not be imposed by means of majority decisions of parliaments; whereas a parliament cannot legislate on the past, ...

E. whereas misinterpretations of history can fuel exclusivist policies and thereby incite hatred and racism

By rejecting the possibility of completely objective historical narratives but upholding the existence of historical facts and the value of historians’ struggle for maximum possible impartiality in clause A, the resolution seems to subscribe to a weak version of the objective historian approach. This, however, does not sit well with the “there can be no reconciliation without truth and remembrance” mantra that is repeated three times in the resolution. The only way to square this circle is to take “truth” in the latter to mean the “truest” possible narrative given the impartiality limitations of historical research, that is, the historians’ best approximation of the singular objective historical truth. If we can achieve a “truest” possible interpretation of history, however, does this

mean that all the narratives other than the “truest” are, to a greater or lesser extent, misinterpretations of history? If yes, these “less-than-truest” interpretations can promote exclusivist tendencies according to clause E which means that anything other than the “truest” narrative is potentially dangerous. This is clearly a highly exclusionary statement that the EP could not have intended to make. A more plausible explanation is that the resolution is torn between the irreconcilable differences between the attempt to dampen the edge of effectively legislating on the most controversial questions of history (because whatever clause C says, this is what the EP was really doing) and the mindless repetition of the “truth and remembrance” mantra. Admittedly, it is all too easy to prey on the statements issued by a political organisation, and no one can expect a text that is clearly the result of compromise and has severe space limitations to express a coherent historiographical theoretical framework and to give complex arguments about the ethics of the representations of the past. But the question remains as to whether several clauses should be included in the text that address these issues at a very elementary level and actually make things even more confusing.

After the RECT, the Parliament adopted a number of resolutions with historical themes and opened its Parliamentarium, but the idea of European memory was not invoked in any of these. The latter, being the first supranational representation of European history, paved the way for the House of European History project which will be analysed in the next section. Additionally, the Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament commissioned a study in 2013 that bore the title *European Historical Memory*.<sup>417</sup> In this document, Markus Prutsch explored the possibilities and the challenges that European memory policies face. He declared that simply trying to transpose memories from the national to the European level, essentially what the early resolutions of 2005 argued for, is not possible. He thus suggested three possible strategies for European memory policy-makers. First, they could just accept the European memory landscape as it is with all its diversity and its conflicts. Second, the EU could attempt to organise a shared European memory around grand ideas and themes, such as freedom; the main challenge here is to agree on topics that are abstract enough to be acceptable for every member state but are specific enough to be something meaningful to them, something that can act as a common point of reference. Finally, the third option identified by Prutsch was the construction of a “genuinely new European collective memory working with clearly defined historical landmarks.”<sup>418</sup> He felt that EU initiatives at that time were mainly following this path, which is essentially equivalent to the thick version of the Europeanist vision. Finally, Prutsch concluded that none of these three strategies is

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<sup>417</sup> Prutsch, “European Historical Memory.”

<sup>418</sup> Ibid., 15.

viable for EU decision-makers and instead openly subscribed to Müller's approach to European memory. Typically for an advocate of what I labelled the thin Europeanist conception, he supported "a critical 'European culture of remembrance' ... a critical 'reworking the past' at national levels ... based on common European principles and values"<sup>419</sup> and thought that the rise of the politics of regret is a favourable development in this direction. It is important to bear in mind that, contrary to what some previous students of European memory politics claimed,<sup>420</sup> Prutsch's study does not define the views of the Committee on Culture and Education on European memory, let alone those of the EU in general. The document explicitly says that it should not be taken to represent the EP's official position on the matter.

### **Reconciliation of European Histories Group and Platform of European Memory and Conscience**

As noted in the previous chapter, there is a significant overlap between the signatories of the Prague Declaration, and the members of the REHG and the PEMC. For this reason, it makes sense to examine the latter two together with respect to their conceptualisation of European memory. Given that the anti-communist stance of these two bodies has already been extensively criticised earlier, in this chapter I will only give a brief overview of their visions of European memory. The goal of the REHG is to consolidate different national narratives into a united European one. The manifesto of the group only talks in terms of nations and national memories so it is fair to say that the REHG only envisages a reconciliation of national memories. According to the REHG, the "true reunification of European history based on truth and remembrance" can only be completed by "converging the views of all the Europe [*sic*] about the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century." This is highly reminiscent of the "common view of European history" envisaged by the RECT on which the member states of the EU need to agree if they are to be united. Furthermore, the goals of the REHG and the RECT are also similar in that they both focus on totalitarianisms of all sorts and their victims. This is not surprising in the light of the fact that many of the rapporteurs of the RECT were also members of the REHG. Where the REHG differs sharply from the RECT is its overtly anti-communist agenda. Although it calls for "a common approach regarding crimes of totalitarian regimes," its members do not hide their belief that the crimes of communism have not received enough attention and that its victims have been discriminated against. After lamenting that "a number of European nations were still deprived of having a voice"

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>420</sup> Sara McDowell and Máire Braniff hastily concluded that "the European Union's approach to historical memory, commemoration and dialogue with history is defined" in this publication. Sara McDowell and Máire Braniff, *Commemoration as Conflict: Space, Memory and Identity in Peace Processes* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 134.

and calling for the “equal treatment and non-discrimination of victims of all totalitarian regimes,” the members of the REHG are open about their main objective which is to integrate “the experience of the post-communist nations into [the] common narrative of the European History [sic].”<sup>421</sup>

The previous chapter put the Platform squarely in the anti-communist camp, but there are important differences between the conception of European memory put forward by the REHG and the PEMC. Contrary to the other actors, the Platform does not suggest that the work on developing a common understanding of totalitarian regimes is a means towards a larger goal; a common commemoration of these crimes is not important because it would strengthen European unity, increase the legitimacy of the EU or contribute to the emergence of a European identity. In the rhetoric of the PEMC, raising awareness of the crimes of totalitarian regimes and honouring their victims is the goal in itself. This clearly non-consequentialist thinking renders the PEMC a more devoted follower of the “duty to remember” framework than any other actor. For this reason, the PEMC is even more narrowly concerned with the development of a common view about totalitarianisms, and not about other aspects of history, than any of the other institutions discussed in this chapter. As we will see with the Europe for Citizens programme and the House of European History, the current tendency is to widen the historical scope of European memory rather than focusing narrowly on one particular group of phenomena. Even the REHG, another platform of the anti-communist group, calls for a common European view of twentieth century history, not simply of totalitarian crimes. The narrow focus of the PEMC, however, allows it to work closely with other specialised organisations in other parts of the world. Although it is only interested in “totalitarian regimes on European territory,”<sup>422</sup> the Platform has several partner institutions in North America which makes it unique in that other institutions working in the field of European memory rarely have connections to the world outside Europe.

### **Europe for Citizens Programme**

Since its early stages, the Europe for Citizens programme has consistently employed a language that centres around the need to preserve and keep alive the memories of Europe’s past. One of the objectives of the first edition of the programme was to bring Europe “closer to its citizens by promoting Europe’s values and achievements, while preserving the memory of its past”; this preservation of the memory of Europe’s past was to be “implemented on a transnational

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<sup>421</sup> “Website of the Reconciliation of European Histories Group.”

<sup>422</sup> “Agreement Establishing the Platform of European Memory and Conscience.”

basis.”<sup>423</sup> This decision was taken in late 2006 and, typically for that time, the memory of Europe’s past was meant to stand for the transnational commemoration of the crimes of totalitarian regimes and their victims. With respect to the totalitarian crimes that should be remembered, the decision on the first edition of the ECP stood between the RWW2 of 2005 and the RECT of 2009; compared to the RWW2, it expanded the scope of commemoration to cover Stalinism, but it did not go as far as the RECT because it still gave primary importance to Nazism and the Holocaust, and it did not include other totalitarian regimes (such as fascist and communist regimes) at all. With time, the programme came to use the term “European memory” more openly and retained the language that called for its preservation (for instance, in setting the annual priorities for 2013).<sup>424</sup> The conference convened by the ECP in 2014 in order to evaluate the first edition of the programme sought to answer whether there is a “a European memory creating a sense of belonging and encouraging civic participation.” We can thus safely say that the concept of European memory was already deeply embedded in the programme after its first seven years. Finally, as explained in the previous chapter, the second edition of the programme for the period 2014-2020 significantly broadened the scope of commemoration so that it now encompass all “totalitarian regimes in Europe’s modern history” and “other defining moments and reference points.”<sup>425</sup> Importantly, the new conception explicitly specifies in its objectives that the memories of the past need to be kept alive in order to raise awareness, among other things, about the historical importance of the EU as a peace project. It remains to be seen what projects will be funded under the new edition of the programme, but this wording suggests that the good old “Europe out of war” narrative is making a comeback not with the strong references to the Holocaust that it had in the mid-2000s, but with a new emphasis on all totalitarianisms.

## House of European History

The HEH is the most recent and also the most ambitious project of European memory politics. Indeed, it has recently gone as far as choosing the idea of European memory as its single most important guiding concept. As mentioned in the previous chapter, after Pöttering’s initial vision of the HEH as a fusion of European memory, history and identity, the Committee of Experts defined it as primarily a project about European history. The *Conceptual Basis* produced by the Committee relied on a traditional “objective historian” framework in which there was little

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<sup>423</sup> European Parliament and Council of the European Union, “Decision No 1904/2006/EC Establishing for the Period 2007 to 2013 the Programme ‘Europe for Citizens’ to Promote Active European Citizenship.”

<sup>424</sup> Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission, “Priority Themes of the Europe for Citizens Programme,” 2014, [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/citizenship/programme/priority\\_themes\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/citizenship/programme/priority_themes_en.php).

<sup>425</sup> Council of the European Union, “Regulation No 390/2014 Establishing the ‘Europe for Citizens’ Programme for the Period 2014-2020.”



room for concepts like memory and identity. The Committee made it clear that the museum should give a “multifaceted and impartial presentation of historical facts and processes,” an accurate and “objective portrayal of history” based on “scientifically proven findings and methods.”<sup>426</sup> In the last few years, the decision-makers behind the museum seemed to have departed from this vision of an objective, monolithic and univocal representation of Europe’s past based on *the* historical truth. It is difficult to know for certain the magnitude of this shift because, as Wolfram Kaiser, Stefan Krankenhagen and Kerstin Poehls noted, the particulars of the exhibition are still shrouded in secrecy despite the fact that it is due to open in May 2017.<sup>427</sup> Nevertheless, it is possible to reconstruct the direction of this conceptual change based on the information materials provided by the museum, on the one hand, and the publications by the members of the Academic Project Team, on the other. Contrary to the “objective historian” stance of the Committee of Experts, this more recent conception of the museum prioritises European memory over the two other foundational concepts of European identity and history. Taja Vovk van Gaal and Christine Dupont, the director and another member of the Academic Project Team, gave several reasons for this choice.<sup>428</sup>

First, in opposition to the previously dominant idea that the member states should work towards a “common view” of European history, Vovk van Gaal and Dupont claimed that the HEH will refrain from the top-down imposition of a politically correct, consensual narrative as it would be difficult to develop and would make “a very boring museum.”<sup>429</sup> Instead, they aim to convey a “multifaceted view of European history”<sup>430</sup> by confronting visitors with different historical interpretations. Second, with respect to European identity, Vovk van Gaal and Dupont admitted that its construction had figured prominently in the initial political justifications of the HEH, but the Team decided not to rely on this concept at all. They reasoned that since there is “no commonly agreed definition”<sup>431</sup> of European identity, the HEH would need to impose its own definition on the visitors from above. As this move would inhibit open debate instead of fostering it, the Team concluded that the notion of European identity “is too reductionist and too static to be used as a basis for the HEH.”<sup>432</sup> Dissatisfied with the notions of the “common view of history” and European identity, this novel conception of the museum thus explicitly placed the idea of European memory at its centre. The importance of promoting debate

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<sup>426</sup> Committee of Experts, “Conceptual Basis for a House of European History,” 7.

<sup>427</sup> Kaiser, Krankenhagen, and Poehls, *Exhibiting Europe In Museums*, 152.

<sup>428</sup> Vovk van Gaal and Dupont, “The House of European History.”

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*

is the reason for the choice of the more fluid notion of collective memory as a tool to support the narrative of the permanent exhibition and the various programmes. Memory is at the same time what divides and what unites Europe. This notion has a strong critical potential, which can be used to promote a dynamic dialogue with the visitors ... Building the HEH as a **reservoir of European memory** offers the possibility to reflect on different perceptions of the past and different interpretations of history. The Academic Project Team is aware of the difficulty of this mission. But the HEH is neither the first nor the latest museum meant as a “forum for contested issues.”<sup>433</sup>

This ambition to become a multi-perspective reservoir of European memory and “a place of meeting, discussion and debate”<sup>434</sup> about different historical interpretations has been consistently repeated in other, and more recent and more official, sources which implies that the museum will eventually follow this conception. In November 2012, Vovk van Gaal spoke about the HEH in exactly these terms during a panel debate in Cambridge.<sup>435</sup> The official information material provided by the museum and the museum’s website all echo this reservoir of European memory conception and the importance of promoting reflection and debate.<sup>436</sup> Andrea Mork, another member of the Academic Project Team, repeated the argumentative moves made by Taja Vovk van Gaal and Christine Dupont almost word for word in presentations as recent as October 2014.<sup>437</sup> She first talked about the vagueness of the notion of European identity which makes it unsuitable as a guiding principle of the HEH; she then moved on to argue that instead of the top-down definition and imposition of a European identity, the HEH should become a reservoir of European memory; finally, she concluded that this concept’s “multiple perspectives and its critical potential” would allow the HEH to present history in a manner that is “complex rather than uniform, more differentiated than homogeneous, critical rather than affirmative.”<sup>438</sup>

There is little information available about what this transnational, multi-perspective reservoir will actually look like. What we do know is that, unlike the Parlamentarium, the narrative presented by the HEH will not start in 1945 and will not only concentrate on the process of

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<sup>433</sup> Ibid., 48–49. Emphasis added.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>435</sup> Taja Vovk van Gaal and Wolfram Kaiser, “Panel Debate ‘Forging a Community: The European Union’s House of European History’” (Public and Popular History Seminar, Sidney Sussex College, University of Cambridge, November 21, 2012), <http://popularhistory.soc.srccf.net/directors-cut/forging-a-community-the-european-unions-house-of-european-history/>.

<sup>436</sup> European Parliament Directorate-General for Communication, “Flyer ‘House of European History’” (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2012); European Parliament Directorate-General for Communication, “Building a House of European History”; “Website of the House of European History,” <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/visiting/en/visits/historyhouse.html>.

<sup>437</sup> Andrea Mork, “Presentation of the House of European History” (First Symposium of European Institutions Dealing with 20<sup>th</sup> Century History–European Remembrance, Gdansk, September 15, 2012), <http://www.europeanremembrance.eu/edition2012/house-of-european-history>; Andrea Mork, “From National Narratives to Shared Memories: Is a Pan-European Memory Possible?” (Networking European Citizenship Education Conference, Vienna, October 16, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=itJylQxnSUw>.

<sup>438</sup> Mork, “Presentation of the House of European History.”

European integration. The museum will present a chronological narrative which will consist of six parts. An introductory theme will explain to the visitors the “philosophy of the House of History.”<sup>439</sup> This will be followed by an overview of the nineteenth century with an emphasis on the technological developments and on the rise of the European colonial powers. The third part will tackle the two world wars and the interwar period. The next two themes will present the post-war period and the last section will be devoted to different visions for the future. Geographically, the scope of the HEH will encompass the whole of the continent, not only the European Union. Furthermore, the HEH will not be a mere “representation of the multiplicity of national histories”<sup>440</sup> but will offer a “transnational perspective on Europe’s history.”<sup>441</sup> The three criteria for historical processes and events to be included in the narrative of the museum are that they originated in Europe, were relevant for all of Europe and are relevant for the present. The continuity between the different themes of the narrative will be maintained by some recurrent motifs and concepts, such as the centre-periphery distinction. Finally, the creators of the HEH are open about having drawn a lot of inspiration from the House of German History (Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland). In fact, the director of the latter, Hans Walter Hütter, chaired the Committee of Experts of the HEH. This might explain the name of the project, but Vovk van Gaal and Dupont also pointed out that the political initiators might have been reluctant to use the word “museum” because of its authoritative, top-down connotations.<sup>442</sup>

After presenting the conception of the museum, I will now turn to its critical analysis. My objective here is to critically evaluate how the decision-makers behind the museum conceptualised European memory and not how they imagined the museum itself. However, in this unique case, the conception of the cultural project and the conception of European memory are one and the same thing. An important critic of the HEH project has been Wolfram Kaiser.<sup>443</sup> Above all, he was sceptical about whether the team behind the museum would be able to resist the political pressure to tell a success story about the EU, a one-directional fairy tale about the linear progress of European integration. Based on previous instances of member states throwing a tantrum whenever their national holy myths had been threatened, Kaiser doubted whether the HEH could present anything more than a watered-down, politically correct, self-congratulatory narrative whose message would basically be: “Believe me, the EU is good for you.” Consequently, he also doubted whether the HEH could actually adopt multi-perspectivity, deal with controversial

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<sup>439</sup> European Parliament Directorate-General for Communication, “Building a House of European History,” 32.

<sup>440</sup> Mork, “Presentation of the House of European History.”

<sup>441</sup> European Parliament Directorate-General for Communication, “Flyer ‘House of European History.’”

<sup>442</sup> Vovk van Gaal and Dupont, “The House of European History,” 50.

<sup>443</sup> Vovk van Gaal and Kaiser, “Panel Debate ‘Forging a Community: The European Union’s House of European History’”; Kaiser, Krakenhagen, and Poehls, *Exhibiting Europe In Museums*.

historical issues (such as collaboration) and foster open debate. Finally, he raised some practical issues such as how the museum will establish a collection from scratch.

Vovk van Gaal and Dupont directly responded to Kaiser and attempted to quell these fears. They acknowledged that, as every museum, the “HEH is a political initiative” but upheld that “the contents of the project are developing independently from the political authorities.”<sup>444</sup> The name of the museum itself, House of European History, had been chosen so as not to imply the ownership of the EU or its institutions (in the way that the Parlamentarium does, for instance).<sup>445</sup> They vowed that the museum will not try to present the process of European integration as “a smooth easy path to success but rather a succession of steps forward and backwards” and that the museum will incorporate a rather defeatist theme on “the difficulties of a continent in surviving the loss of its hegemony.”<sup>446</sup> They also promised that it will be made “very clear to the visitor that the contents of the museum are only the product of the choices made by a team at a certain moment,” that the HEH “does not possess a truth on European history.” They hoped that with this modest attitude they would be able to break with the “authoritative role of the museum” which would not be worthy of a “museum of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” Vovk van Gaal and Dupont regretted that despite “all efforts to remain as open as possible the HEH will be received by some as a kind of truth on European history imposed top-down on the public,” and that it is already presented in this manner, even by academics (for instance, by Kaiser).<sup>447</sup>

Apart from repeating the promises (that look too good to be true indeed), Vovk van Gaal and Dupont provided very few concrete examples about how they would avoid presenting the history of European integration as a teleological success story. Most notably, they explained how they plan to present the “peace narrative,” the story about European integration being the guarantor of peace on the continent, in a non-didactic and unequivocally positive way. This is rather difficult to do given that the EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012; the medal and the certificate have been donated to the museum as the first items in its collection and they will be presented towards the end of the exhibition. Vovk van Gaal and Dupont assured that “precisely in order to avoid a one-directional perspective, it will be presented in the broader context of the debate and the challenging and opposing voices,” such as the voices of those who demonstrated against the award ceremony in Oslo.<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> Vovk van Gaal and Dupont, “The House of European History,” 47.

<sup>445</sup> Vovk van Gaal and Kaiser, “Panel Debate ‘Forging a Community: The European Union’s House of European History.’”

<sup>446</sup> Vovk van Gaal and Dupont, “The House of European History,” 50.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid., 50.

In my opinion, we do not yet know enough about the museum project to voice fears about how the grand promises might not be fulfilled in the end. Admittedly, the secrecy surrounding the project is not an encouraging sign. Kaiser et al. were right in saying that, paradoxically, the lack of transparency “simply confirmed the view, held by many, that the EU was an opaque bureaucratic apparatus”<sup>449</sup> which was precisely the belief that the democratic-deficit-reducing museum project was meant to disprove. Even so, I think that it is unfair and premature to criticise the museum for mistakes that we anticipate that they will make but that they have not yet actually committed. The time to attack the decision-makers behind the HEH for only paying lip service to multi-perspectivity and to the engagement with visitors will be when they have actually done that. Until then, until we see what the expectations and promises are that they have eventually failed to live up to, let us give them the benefit of the doubt.

More importantly, I argue that it is not the time to worry about the practical implementation of the grand ideas behind the HEH because there is plenty of wrong with those grand ideas themselves. It is the current conception of the museum itself that we should criticise for a number of issues, and not the way we speculate that it will be implemented. The following critique is also a “speculation,” in a way, of course, simply because it aims to reconstruct the conception of the museum and the intentions of the creators based on limited information. However, this “speculation” differs from previous ones in that it is “abstract speculation” about the general direction of the museum that could logically follow from the most fundamental ideas behind it, and not “concrete speculation” about how particular historical events and particular controversial issues will be presented in the HEH.

To start with, there are some serious internal contradictions within the conception itself and some logical gaps in the argument supporting it. The most obvious flaw in the argument of the creators of the HEH is that they claimed to dismiss the notion of European identity on the basis that it has “no commonly agreed definition” while they appreciated collective memory for its “fluidity.” As Chapter 2 has demonstrated, however, one could hardly find a more polysemous and vaguer concept than collective memory. If the HEH claims to be able to present a non-monolithic historical narrative and to become a place of debate about the non-predefined notion of European memory, the question that naturally arises is why it would not be able to convey, and to promote reflection about, a non-predefined, non-monolithic notion of European identity. The argument is certainly very weak, but this becomes of secondary importance when one realises that the notion of European identity is actually cunningly smuggled into the conception in disguise.

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<sup>449</sup> Kaiser, Kränkenhagen, and Poehls, *Exhibiting Europe In Museums*, 152.

While official statements by the team behind the museum indeed refrain from using the “i-word,” they employ a number of euphemistic phrases which can be considered anything but identity-related. When they claim that, as a reservoir of European memory, the HEH will provide “the basis for the evolution of a common consciousness,” will help “to forge a common European self-awareness”<sup>450</sup> and will “contribute to the formation of a European historical consciousness,”<sup>451</sup> how do their statements differ from Pöttering’s initial plans for the museum to “help to promote an awareness of European identity?”<sup>452</sup> How can the forging of “a common European self-awareness” be interpreted as anything other than the process by which people become conscious about their being European (which is a fine definition of European identity if I have ever seen one)? Only Mork stated plainly that the “HEH should become a platform for the dialogue on European identity.”<sup>453</sup> Even if the creators of the HEH generally shy away from using the term openly, European identity is in fact deeply embedded in the conception of the museum under the calls for a common European consciousness and common European awareness.

Another issue is the tension between the two main goals proclaimed by the HEH. On the one hand, the creators of the museum wish to “convey a coherent historical narrative” in the permanent exhibition; on the other hand, they intend to “raise awareness of the existence of a variety of different historical interpretations ... so as to stimulate reflection and debate.”<sup>454</sup> The decision-makers themselves admitted that this dichotomy “could appear contradictory,” but they thought that these dual objectives are reconcilable and are “at the basis of many museums.”<sup>455</sup> In principle, the two goals are not completely incompatible indeed. A coherent narrative will necessarily be composed of a chronological succession of historical events. Each of these events, and the historical processes that connect them, can be explained from many different points of view which might produce a reasonably multi-perspective whole. The real problem comes not when these two goals are pitted against each other, but when they are considered in the light of the third proclaimed ambition of the museum to become a reservoir of European memory. It may be true that other museums have the same dual objectives, but it is also true that no other museum purports to be a reservoir of collective memory. The intention to build a memory reservoir raises a number of questions with respect to the other two objectives of the museum. A reservoir collects all the water coming down a mountainous area indiscriminately, irrespective of its origin. If we

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<sup>450</sup> Mork, “Presentation of the House of European History.”

<sup>451</sup> European Parliament Directorate-General for Communication, “Building a House of European History,” 24.

<sup>452</sup> European Parliament, “Press Release ‘EP Bureau Decides to Set Up a “House of European History,”” December 16, 2008, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?language=en&type=IM-PRESS&reference=20081216IPR44855>.

<sup>453</sup> Mork, “Presentation of the House of European History.”

<sup>454</sup> European Parliament Directorate-General for Communication, “Building a House of European History,” 22.

<sup>455</sup> Vovk van Gaal and Dupont, “The House of European History,” 48.

take this metaphor seriously, on what grounds are the historical events and processes that compose the coherent narrative of the exhibition selected? On what grounds are the (necessarily limited range of) dissenting voices that are to be presented selected? Choosing historical events and alternative interpretations to be exhibited necessarily involves a good deal of selection from the infinite number of events and voices that could be presented. This is perfectly normal for any museum that aims to present a coherent narrative and a multiplicity of interpretations, but I argue that it is not acceptable for a museum that claims to be a reservoir of collective memory. For this reason, it seems that, if anything, the exhibition will be an ordered collection of water samples taken from different, pre-determined points of the imaginary memory reservoir. The problem of selection is exacerbated by the fact that the events and the voices that are the most likely to be included in the exhibition are the ones that are already strongly embedded in the public representations of the past. Truly marginalised and minority myths, however, are likely to fall under the exhibitors' radar.

Thirdly, the current conception of the museum is quite ambiguous about how the HEH will engage with the visitors in particular and with the public in general, how debate will be generated and between whom. The creators acknowledged the importance of involving the larger public in the deliberation about the museum's conception, but they were at best ambivalent towards the idea. They reasoned that there is "no ideal recipe" as some previous attempts in the Netherlands and France were "abandoned after endless public debates about the political nature of the project and the legitimacy of spending public funds for that purpose" while museums in Germany dealt with this successfully.<sup>456</sup> It appears that, rather than risking these "endless public debates," the creators of the HEH decided not to seek the input of the public, at least at this stage. They nevertheless stated that the participation of visitors in enriching the museum's collection will be of utmost importance as their "stories, memories and even objects" will "fill this 'reservoir of collective memory' that the HEH is expected to become."<sup>457</sup> In principle, incorporating the personal stories of the visitors into the museum could certainly ease the tension between the three ambitions discussed in the previous paragraph. Whether the stories that visitors bring to the museum can succeed in this largely depends on how they are actually integrated into the museum. There is no information available on this issue, but if we think about what could logically follow from this, there are two dilemmas that the HEH may face. Should all personal stories that fit the three criteria mentioned above (originated in Europe, relevant for all of Europe and relevant for the present) be in principle admissible or only those that fit into the initial narrative of the

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<sup>456</sup> Ibid.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid., 51–52.

exhibition (that is, those that are related to the historical events and processes that the creators selected for the narrative)? Should these stories be incorporated into the main narrative of the exhibition or should they be presented in another way (for instance, in a separate part of the museum)? Given these questions, there are four main strategies that can be followed.

- a) The HEH will accept only those stories that fit into the initial narrative and will incorporate them into the main narrative.
- b) The HEH will accept only those stories that fit into the initial narrative but will not incorporate them into the main narrative.
- c) The HEH will accept even those stories that do not fit into the initial narrative and will incorporate them into the main narrative.
- d) The HEH will accept even those stories that do not fit into the initial narrative but will not incorporate them into the main narrative.

The problem is that all of these scenarios run counter to one of the three stated goals of the museum. The promise about building a reservoir of memory cannot be fulfilled if the stories that do not fit into the main narrative are excluded. Some social groups might cherish certain historical events and processes that the creators of the HEH do not find important enough to include in the initial narrative of the exhibition. If such stories are considered inadmissible by the HEH, how can it hope to eventually become a true reservoir of memory? Options a) and b) thus violate this promise. With respect to the other dilemma, the choice not to integrate the stories received from the visitors into the main narrative of the museum would effectively create a hierarchy between the memories contained in the museum. A distinction between first-class and second-class memories, between the memories that the creators of the museum deem worthy to be included in the main narrative and the memories that are only important for the visitors, would also significantly curtail the ability of the HEH to become a memory reservoir. Options b) and d) thus undermine this ambition, with b) now being a double offender against this goal. Lastly, following scenario c) would be a big step towards a reservoir of European memory, but it would not sit well with the expectation to convey a coherent narrative. Considering all memories in principle admissible and including them in the main narrative would necessarily erode the coherence of the initial narrative. Whichever strategy the team behind the HEH chooses, they will definitely have to do a good deal of selection. While I vowed not to engage in speculation about the practical implementation of the museum's grand promises, I cannot help but wonder what will prevent the visitor input of the HEH from degenerating into something like the propaganda room of the Parlamentarium where carefully selected "ordinary people" tell their stories about how



European projects have changed their life (surprise, surprise) for the better. The bulwark against this undesirable outcome would be a high degree of transparency about the decision-making process, something that the HEH is not well-endowed with at the moment.

But let us assume that, despite the apparent tensions between the stated goals of the museum, despite the practical difficulties of implementing these goals, the team behind the HEH manages to arrive at a good compromise that satisfies all three of their expectations reasonably well. Even in this unlikely situation, I would raise questions about some of the more fundamental theoretical choices that the creators of the museum have made. Specifically, the conception of the museum is heavily influenced by the work of Habermas, Müller and Aleida Assmann. The inspiration from these figures, with whom I have already critically engaged in previous chapters, was even made explicit by the creators of the museum. The influence of Habermas can be most clearly felt in the ambition of the museum to become a forum where deliberation on European memory and identity can take place. Mork even asserted that “the construction of a transnational, pan-European memory should take place through a process of communication, in the light of public discussion—as Jürgen Habermas would put it.”<sup>458</sup> This is a fine example of the teleological consensus-seeking ambition of communicative reason which has been extensively criticised in Chapter 4. As made clear by Mork,<sup>459</sup> Assmann’s conception of European memory, which was discussed in Chapter 5, is the other main influence on the conception of the museum.

I argue that, if the initiators of the HEH are to take the reservoir metaphor seriously, they should not think in terms of a museum whose content is managed by a team of experts. To take the reservoir idea to its logical end point, one should rather think in terms of a (virtual or actual) social space where individuals and organised social groups can come together, represent the stories that are important to them and engage in dialogue about past events. Visitors do not only contribute to the content, but they generate the content themselves (in fact, they should be thought about as participants instead of visitors). This would effectively strengthen connections between the transnational and the subnational analytical systems of myth. Apart from making it possible for individuals and social groups to generate their own representations of the past and engage in dialogue, what is also needed in this mythspace is critical and sentimental education which would challenge exclusionary tendencies and would make understanding between participants easier. The vision of a pluralist European mythspace, within which such a social space is a possible way to promote dialogue, will be outlined in detail in the next chapter.

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<sup>458</sup> Mork, “Presentation of the House of European History.”

<sup>459</sup> Mork, “From National Narratives to Shared Memories.”



## Conclusion: Pluralist European Mythscape

In the previous chapters, I explored many different conceptualisations of European memory that are prevalent in academia and in European institutions. I concluded that they all tend to instrumentalize the idea in the service of a political and/or cultural identity, and they are all based on a teleological framework that envisages the dissolution of conflicting visions of the past. However they conceive the idea, European institutions primarily pursue European memory in order to bolster a certain European identity (or, at least, a “common European self-awareness”). Most scholarly conceptions of European memory are also geared towards providing foundations for some form of self-identification and are thus dominated by problem-solving thinking. I argued for a more critical approach that is free from these teleological assumptions and from the burden of providing legitimization for a political authority. In the following, I will conclude my dissertation by outlining the vision of a pluralist European mythscape based on the ethics of myth developed in Part I that calls for simultaneously challenging and acknowledging all myths.

### **About Memory Zealots and Herodians**

I argued that at the core of the European memory wars lies the antagonism between “civilising Westerners” and “Eastern European freedom fighters” (which are necessarily ideal typical rather than actual scholarly positions). Crudely put, the civilisers would like to see Eastern Europeans adopt a more regretful approach to their past while the freedom fighters uphold the validity of their traditional national myths of glory and victimhood. The civilisers accuse the freedom fighters of backwardness, the latter accuse the former of ideological colonisation, and both of them appeal to some version of moral and historical truth. It is important to note that many “civilising Westerners” are not from the West and a few “Eastern European freedom fighters” are not from the East. In fact, most Eastern European societies are split between civilisers and freedom fighters. In the following, I will explain the reason for this division in terms of the two strategies that Eastern Europeans can employ to deal with the “backward” label, comment on its destructiveness and suggest ways to overcome it.

The Enlightenment belief in the linear progress of history is in many ways still the framework with which most people make sense of the world. Most of them no longer (or at least not explicitly) divide the world into civilised and barbaric nations, but we still talk about developed and undeveloped (or at best developing) regions, democratic and authoritarian regimes, and progressive and traditional ways of life. The label of backwardness has become a powerful rhetorical tool in the hands of those who have already established their position as modern, the “normals.” The reason for this is that the standard of modernity has become so pervasive that even the people who are stigmatized as backward by the “established” evaluate themselves in terms of this standard. If those who are labelled backward did not care about the standard of modernity, the label would not carry much weight, it would not become a stigma.<sup>460</sup> It is therefore the fact that even the “backwards” have internalised the standard that renders the label potent and stigmatizing. There are two popular strategies that are often taken by the individuals stigmatized as backward by those in the position of authority: they either become the active confirmation of that label or the active contradiction of it, a “Herodian” or a “Zealot.”<sup>461</sup> Those who follow the first strategy play the part of the “brute” and take pride in their backwardness; they still see themselves through the standard of modernity, but they consider backwardness to be a virtue, not a sin. Those who choose to actively contradict the stigma do everything in their power not to be perceived as backward by the normals; as they live in constant fear of their backwardness being discovered, they are obsessed with appearances and take extra caution not to have any association with the backwards and their customs. In reality, most responses to stigma are somewhere in-between these two extremes, but I will use these two labels as heuristic tools to illuminate the situation in Eastern Europe.

In her theory of international stigmatization, Ayşe Zarakol extended the notion of stigma to the realm of the international based on the claim that “stigma has the same effect on states that it has on individuals.”<sup>462</sup> She argued that the stigma of backwardness weighs heavily on non-Western states; it determines their actions, their self-image and their relationship with the West. Thinking about national collectives as bearing a stigma in the same way as individuals creates certain problems; most importantly, it gives the impression that Western individuals are free from the stigma of backwardness, whereas this label is an important disciplining tool within Western states as well. However, Zarakol’s suggestion does contain an important insight, namely that the backwardness of one’s country can also be a source of stigma for the individual. Therefore, I argue

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<sup>460</sup> Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963).

<sup>461</sup> Ayşe Zarakol, *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 254.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid., 4.

that it is useful to think about stigma as if it functioned on (at least) two levels: individuals can be stigmatized for their own backwardness within their society and also for the backwardness of their country within the international system. Viewed in this light, the stigmatized non-Western individuals, and not the states, face a choice between becoming Zealots or Herodians. In their attempt to become more Western than the Westerners, the Zealots take on everything that they associate with the West uncritically, while the Herodians take pride in rejecting everything Western.

The dilemma between Zealots and Herodians is difficult for every stigmatized, but it is even more acute for the individuals in the (social or international) semi-periphery. The semi-periphery is torn between the core and the periphery, it is neither completely modern nor completely backward. It is a liminal situation, a state of being in-between categories, being neither here nor there, being neither really us nor completely the “Other.” Mälksoo and Wydra<sup>463</sup> borrowed the term from the field of anthropology<sup>464</sup> to make sense of the situation in which most Eastern Europeans find themselves. They are neither really the West nor really the East; they are Europe, but they are not quite Europe; they need to live with the “stigma of being poor, backward cousins in the European family.”<sup>465</sup> The stigma of backwardness is discrediting in every case, but it “bites” especially deeply in the flesh of those in a liminal situation, such as Eastern Europeans, because for them Europeanness, modernity and Westernness are so close yet so far. The Zealots find themselves torn between the desire to be one of the West and the impossibility of ever being perceived as truly one of the West. They stand for everything that they perceive to be universal, advanced, liberal and cosmopolitan and cut every tie with what they consider to be the idiosyncrasies of their country. The Herodians are the active negation of everything that they perceive to be Western; they are also obsessed with their appearances, but they choose to exaggerate their particularistic ties, such as nation, ethnicity, ancestry, religion and tradition. These categories are ideal types, of course, but I think that they illuminate the situation in liminal cases such as Eastern Europe. I repeat that my argument is not that the opposition between the progressives and the traditionals is specifically non-Western; in fact, this opposition describes most political struggles over the world at least since the French Revolution. My argument is that this opposition between Zealots and Herodians in certain liminal situations is often particularly pronounced and antagonistic because of the overlapping layers of stigma. The source of this

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<sup>463</sup> Maria Mälksoo, “Liminality and Contested Europeanness: Conflicting Memory Politics in the Baltic Space,” in *Identity and Foreign Policy: Baltic-Russian Relations and European Integration*, ed. Piret Ehin and Eiki Berg (Farnham: Routledge, 2009), 65–83; Harald Wydra, *Communism and the Emergence of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>464</sup> Árpád Szakolczai, *Reflexive Historical Sociology* (London: Routledge, 2009); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: AldineTransaction, 1995).

<sup>465</sup> Julie Mostov, “The Use and Abuse of History in Eastern Europe: A Challenge for the 90s,” *Constellations* 4, no. 3 (1998): 376.

insecurity is that Eastern Europeans do not only need to deal with the question of individual modernity within their countries, but also with the anxiety of their country not being modern, Western, European enough.

Thinking in terms of overlapping layers of stigma also provides a possible explanation for the fickle internal and external politics of liminal countries. The Hungarian poet Endre Ady described Hungary as a “ferry country,” as a country that is constantly going back and forth between the East and the West throughout its history.<sup>466</sup> This image was influential for later theorists of Eastern European development, such as István Bibó and Jenő Szűcs.<sup>467</sup> In the framework of overlapping layers of stigma, the relative strength of the Zealots and the Herodians within a given country at a certain point in history determines its general orientation, both internally and externally. This produces an oscillating movement between forced modernisation and obsessive “return to the roots” where the sharp changes between the two “ports” of the ferry could be associated with the turning points of world history.

In the case of Eastern Europe, the stigma of backwardness has many destructive effects. It contributes to antagonism on two levels: between Western and Eastern Europe, and within Eastern European countries. These relationships are antagonistic because of the shared belief in modernity as an absolute standard. What is even more worrying is that the standard of modernity perpetuates these antagonisms. One would expect that once the liminal state fulfils the demanding criteria of modernity, it would gain entry into the exclusive club of the normals. However, there are two reasons why this might not be the case. First, the stigma is necessary for upholding the self-image of the normals. Stigma does not simply discredit its possessor, but it also serves the function of reinforcing the normality of the normals. “Eastern Europe has traditionally been indispensable to Western Europe’s self-image”; as “alike alters,” the Easterners have been a point of reference in relation to which the Westerners could imagine themselves as modern and innovative.<sup>468</sup> This why Zarakol said that the bar of entry keeps moving;<sup>469</sup> as the normal needs the stigma as much as the backward wants to overcome it, stigmatization is a very rigid and self-perpetuating system. The second reason for this self-perpetuation is that the opposing forces within the backward state also frame their struggle against each other in the modern-backward

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<sup>466</sup> Endre Ady, “Morituri,” *Figyelő* 1, no. 2 (1905): 633–35.

<sup>467</sup> Jenő Szűcs, “The Three Historical Regions of Europe: An Outline,” *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 29, no. 2/4 (1983): 131–84. See also András Kovács, Anikó Horváth, and Zsuzsanna Vidra, “The Ferry-Country between East and West: Debates on Modernity and Europe in Hungary,” in *Europe, Nations and Modernity*, ed. Atsuko Ichijo (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 158–82.

<sup>468</sup> Mälksoo, “Liminality and Contested Europeanness,” 68.

<sup>469</sup> Zarakol, *After Defeat*, 248.

dichotomy; they also need each other and the stigma because beyond the obsessive pursuit of Westernness and its forceful negation, they have little on which they could base their identity.

The antagonism that underlies the European memory wars is therefore part of a much greater pattern. The struggle between the unruly, backward and emotional Eastern nationalists who are driven by historical resentment and the principled, modern and rational Western civilisers who face the dark side of their past in a mature way is just one aspect of the broader antagonism caused by the modern-backward dichotomy and the resulting stigmatization. Overcoming this stigma is crucial in reducing the antagonistic nature of the memory wars. But what can be done to change such a rigid, self-perpetuating system? For the stigmatized, the choice is “between becoming a Zealot or a Herodian, but it is actually the fact that one is faced with this choice, more than the actual choice itself, that reinforces the condition of stature inferiority.”<sup>470</sup> Zarakol thus suggested that the stigmatized should refuse to make this choice and embrace ambivalence. This is a necessary step, but it is far from sufficient. What gives power to the stigma of backwardness is the internalisation of the standard of modernity by all parties. The stigmatized does not only need to reject the choice between Zealotry and Herodianism, but also the standard of modernity itself. However, this would still only end the antagonism within the state and the “modern” states would still regard it as backward. Since stigma is relational, a one-sided rejection of the underlying standard does not bring an end to the antagonism. What is needed is that all parties concerned (Western and Eastern, Zealot and Herodian) co-operate in challenging the dichotomy between moderns and backwards. This needs to be done case by case, debate by debate. I situate my argument for a pluralist European mythscape within this broader, much more ambitious project. I believe that this dialogue reinforced by critical and sentimental education would contribute to the broader effort to end the antagonism created by exclusionist categories of thought such as moral truth, historical truth and modernity.

It must be noted that the rejection of the standard of modernity does not mean the rejection of everything that are associated with modernity. Human rights, the eradication of diseases and democracy would still be important goals (at least for those who subscribe to them). The rejection of modernity only means that the justification for these goals should not be framed in terms of unwavering certainties such as truth and the progress of history. This should not be read as a Herodian call for the “return to the roots”; I argue for anti-foundationalism, not anti-modernism. I agree with Rorty that many highly desirable social institutions that are associated

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<sup>470</sup> Ibid., 242.

with modernity have become “facts of the world,” and the attempt to build solid foundations for them on unquestionable Enlightenment reason no longer serves its purpose.<sup>471</sup>

### **The Vision of a Pluralist European Mythscape**

The main promise of a pluralist European mythscape is that it would be an effective way to overcome the antagonisms that currently dominate the politics of the past in Europe. Contrary to previous conceptualisations of European memory, it is not aimed at providing foundations for a political authority and at ending mnemonic conflicts. Ending antagonism does not mean the end of conflict; it only means that the nature of difference changes to a more peaceful, agonistic relationship. The following account of what a pluralist European mythscape might look like is inspired by the later works of Mäklsoo in which she departed from several arguments that I have criticised in Chapter 5. She became critical about the concept of collective memory, the notion of national memory and, most importantly, about Eastern European attempts to securitise these “national” memories. She came to agree with the “impossibility at any time of excluding conflict, disagreement and discord from political action”<sup>472</sup> and argued that the “alleged anti-communist consensus varies greatly in the postcommunist countries of Eastern Europe.”<sup>473</sup> Mäklsoo even advocated a Bakhtinian dialogue and “agonistic mnemonic pluralism” on the European level that reconceptualises “a self-other relationship from that of enemies to ideological and mnemonical opponents,” but this needs to be fleshed out because sometimes she seemed to be content with a “mutually accepted agreement to disagree on the ‘national’ interpretations of historical events.”<sup>474</sup>

The vision of a pluralist European mythscape requires a transnational European co-operation with respect to the public representation of past events. In some sense, it is already happening, but its current aim is mostly to find a common narrative for Europe. I agree with Müller that what is necessary is not the harmonisation of the content of historical narratives, but the harmonisation of the values and practices with which Europeans deal with conflicting visions of the past; however, contrary to Müller, I think that these shared values and practices should be based on the pluralist ethics of myth outlined in Chapter 4. This calls for simultaneously acknowledging and challenging all public representations of the past. Acknowledgement means that all identity groups have the right to represent their narratives and participate in the process of identity formation, but it does not mean the positive endorsement of the narrative. It avoids the most common problems associated with positive recognition: narrative hierarchy and the

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<sup>471</sup> Rorty, “Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality.”

<sup>472</sup> Mäklsoo, “Memory Must Be Defended,” 232.

<sup>473</sup> Mäklsoo, “Criminalizing Communism,” 86.

<sup>474</sup> Mäklsoo, “Memory Must Be Defended,” 231; 233.



competition of victimhood narratives. The challenge to all narratives takes the form of critical and sentimental education which are primarily meant to overcome the mutually exclusionary nature of myths.

The transnational harmonisation of these values and practices would primarily happen on the national level. Realistically, only the states have the resources to drastically change educational practices and to take steps towards a dialogical relationship between identity-constitutive narratives in their national mythscapes. While subnational and transnational actors are certainly important in initiating change and encouraging states to act, national governments still have an important role to play in bringing about a more agonistic European mythspace. The linguistic differences in Europe also favour a more localised approach at first. This would not reinforce the supposed primordial status of nation states as the hitherto official narratives would be challenged on two fronts: by subaltern narratives on a more level playing field and by new educational approaches. It is expected that, despite the linguistic differences, more agonistic national mythscapes would mean more interaction between actors operating on different analytical systems of myth, on the transnational, the national and the subnational levels. This might be facilitated by new technologies, but it might simply mean the strengthening of the existing ties between different actors, such as NGOs. A House of European History, not conceived as a museum but as a transnational social space, a mythspace, where visitors create the content and engage in dialogue, is also a potentially fruitful interaction between the transnational and the subnational levels. With time, the critical and sentimental educational tools could also take on a more transnational character. This does not mean joint history textbooks of the kind currently produced; this means the education of the critical tools with which different historical narratives can be evaluated, on the one hand, and the telling of sentimental stories that are meant to “manipulate” emotions, on the other. The aim of these educational practices is to challenge exclusionary characteristics that might be based on moral and historical truth claims and the distinction between the modern and the backward.

Since dialogue is not about winning a rational debate, but about furthering understanding and tolerance, linguistic competence in a shared “second first language” is not a requirement in these transnational contexts. In a debate, a linguistically less competent participant is at a disadvantage. A dialogue is also conflictual, but it is less competitive because the aim is not to convince but to understand each other. The overall aim is a less antagonistic mythspace; this requires intense dialogue which is not affected by the fact that the narrative of an identity group is not able to reach everyone.

This pluralist European mythscape envisions that widely different voices can engage with each other in a dialogical relationship within and across national boundaries. It is certainly a demanding vision, but it is much less demanding than the other solutions to deal with conflicting mythologies. It is less difficult to achieve than the European public sphere of Habermas which would require a transnational forum where participants, who all share a common second first language, can engage in rational debate free from material interests. It is more realistic than Müller's view where each national community engages in a similarly rational debate and comes to a consensus about political regret. It is certainly much less demanding than the attempt to find a single unified narrative or set of narratives on which all (or at least most) Europeans can agree. It is also not necessary that the participants owe political loyalty to the process of deliberation, or share a cultural identity with everyone else on the continent, as the thin and thick conceptions of European memory require.

Some might find that this lack of political and cultural attachment to the pluralist project is something that renders it unworkable. The criticism might be that all political institutions require some mythical foundations. I think that this misses the point that the pluralist mythscape is not a "thing" or an institution, but an ideal. Unlike other conceptions, it does not require a transnational forum or the transnational projection of a narrative. What it requires is a commitment from the states to the harmonised values and practices. This is already demanding, but it requires just as much attachment from the citizens as European competition law or the Emissions Trading System, for instance. If the states guarantee the conditions for agonism (that is, they adhere to the pluralist principles and implement the changes to their educational system), the actual dialogue is supposed to follow. The commitment of the states does not necessarily come from a top-down "push" from Euro-technocrats. Such a push might help, but what is much more important is that subnational actors realise the value of dialogue and they themselves demand a more agonistic approach to the past from the states.

Finally, some would argue that it is very naive to expect states to act as benevolent guardians over the mythscape and that it is unrealistic to entrust states with the organisation of an agonistic mythscape as they are the biggest threat to it. This is a valid criticism, and it is true that states have a tendency to aggressively promote exclusionary narratives, especially in times of crisis. However, there is no reason to believe that this cannot change. The pluralist ethics of myth emphasised the self-reflexive potential of social agents, their capacity to reflect on social structures and to try to change them if they find them wanting; if enough people engage in this self-reflexive process, in which education and academia have a special role, this can make states commit to the idea of an agonistic mythscape. Moreover, this criticism does not take into account that modern

democracies are built on the logic of “entrusting the wolf with tending to the sheep.” The rights of individuals are supposed to be protected by states when we know that at the same time these very states are the greatest threats to individual rights. In this sense, the vision of an agonistic mythscape is not more naive or unrealistic than that of democratic rule.

### **Towards a European Memory Armistice**

In a pluralist European mythscape, the points that currently generate the most heated debates in the European memory wars can be accommodated and challenged at the same time. The debate about the uniqueness and the comparability of totalitarian regimes and the related “number wars” can all take place within this framework and the role of critical education is not to provide the “right” answer to these issues. What critical education would teach in this respect is that it is important to see these debates (and any debate about historical narratives for that matter) as partly a question of faith because every historical account is partial in both senses of the word, that is, biased and incomplete. Pluralism also implies that difference should be a viable option in these debates and that participants should be open to each other’s views, which are the essence of dialogue. The critical and sentimental educational tools would thus encourage participants not to regard their position in terms of moral and historical truth, and of modernity and backwardness.

As I indicated earlier, the antagonism of the European memory wars is only part of a greater antagonism that flows from the stigmatization of the “backward” by the “modern.” The conflicting visions of the past are just one aspect of this problem, but dealing with one aspect already changes the situation. The ideal of a pluralist European mythscape does not promise the resolution of differences between myths, it does not promise a European memory peace. Conflicts will most certainly remain central to the European politics of the past, but this does not necessarily mean memory war; the aim of my dissertation was to propose a pluralist approach where these conflicting visions of the past can and should be made to work in the interest of (rather than against) democracy, and they can and should be embraced in a way that their advocates transform from enemies to adversaries. If anything, this is a European memory armistice. After the long antagonism of the European memory wars, it is certainly time now to return from the trenches to agonistic politics.



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